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THE MAGAZINE OF Fantasy AND Science Fiction

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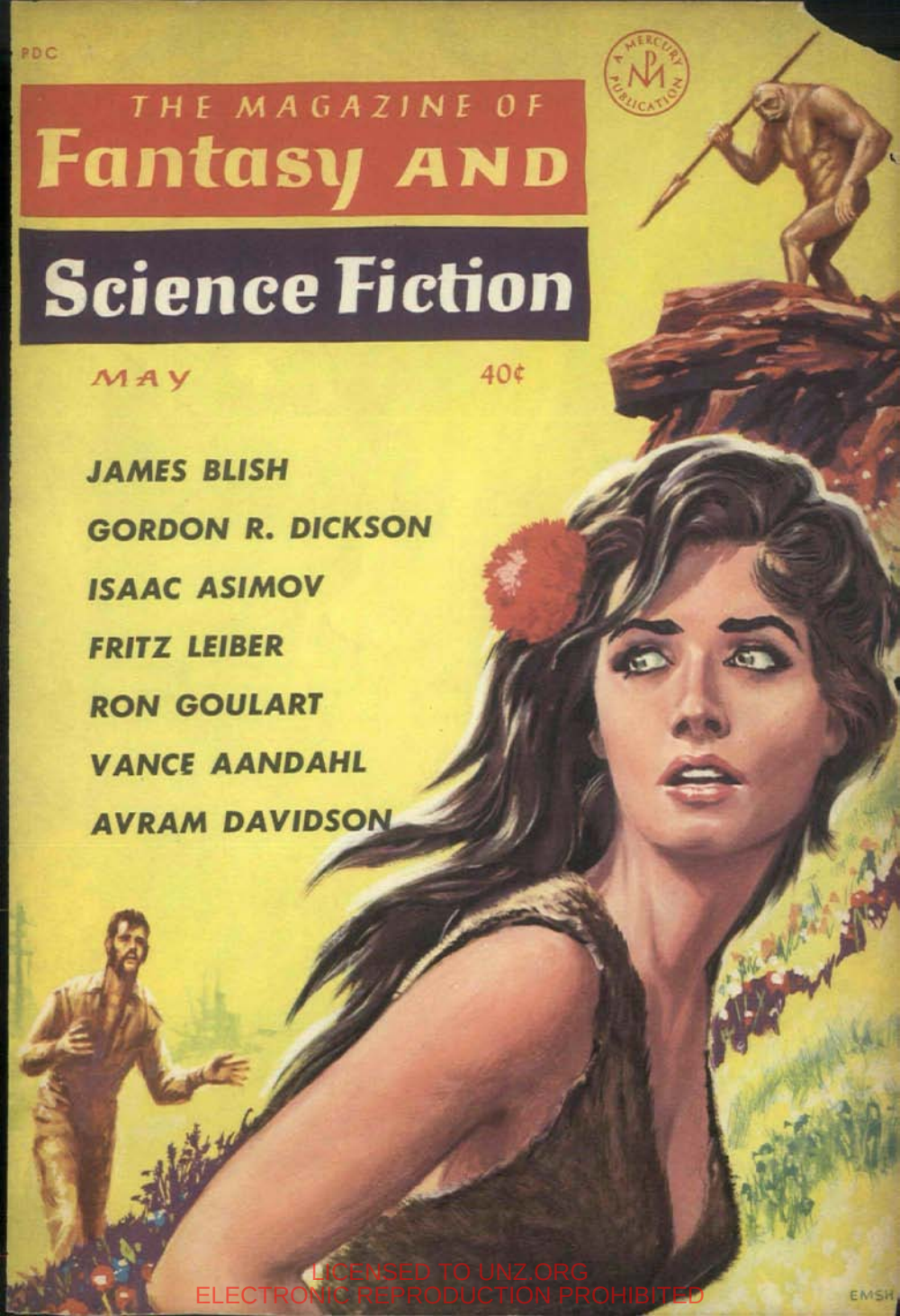

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

MAY *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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EDITORIAL

Editing The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction has proven to be both fascinating and exciting, even though the amenities of the office do not include so much as a single tall and beautiful female secretary (or Girl Friday), fanatically loyal and infinitely devoted. For the time being we will continue to do our very best with what staff we have, *videlicet:* our ace agent, Mr. Pettifogle, whose pursuit of biographical intelligence regarding our shyer authors has carried him into the remotest bat-caves and perilous seas; our Miss Mossmolar, whose vast experience with periodical fiction began with her employment on *Godey's Ladies' Book,* and whose inability to master the typewriter is more than compensated by her keen eye for such double-entendres and rude words which certain of our contributors continue to attempt to smuggle into their stories; and Horatio, our somewhat elderly but industrious office-boy whose last name we can never quite remember—he is said at one time to have written quantities of popular juvenile fiction of a wholesome and improving nature—and whose conviction that he will yet (as he puts it) "Rise in the world" never flags: *bonne chance,* Horatio! Meanwhile, friends of The Magazine continue to offer us advice. We are not ungrateful, and, lacking time to reply to each, chose to make this statement a reply to all. *We do not plan to*: have a letter column, print regular reviews of amateur SF publications ("fanzines")—although we may possibly consider an annual or biannual survey of the same, use paintings of the Dribble School for covers, write stories based on other peoples' great ideas and split the money with them, use interior illustrations (not even of nude women), raise our rates to five cents a word, reduce our subscriptions to a dollar a year, publish a monthly account of flying saucer reports, publish a monthly account denouncing flying saucer reports, change established SF editorial policy of refusing to read MSS typed single spaced with a red ribbon on yellow paper, or many other things—some of which we would really like to do. *We do plan to*: keep an open mind on the subject of changes in The Magazine, remain receptive to new types of stories, be willing to hear from any of our readers even though unable in most cases to reply, endeavor to print the best of the material submitted to us and encourage the submission of more, and to keep eye and ear open for good fantasy and science fiction published outside the field and available for reprint.

Avram Davidson

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*"Oh, G—!" we exclaimed, unpardonably profane, when we first saw the title of this story. "Not another Pact-With-The-Devil story! Mercy!" But Duty, to which all Science Fiction editors are notoriously slaves, called; we answered; read; were so taken by the story that we not only bought it on the spot (with some questionable moidores we keep on hand for such occasions) but ate our words—*au gratin, *and a little sprinkling of chives. Terry Carr now joins the many SF fans who have gone on (or descended) to professional SF writing. He says of his career to date: "Railway Express flunkey, jr.-jr.-jr. accountant in stocks and bonds, phone solicitor, encyclopedia salesman, market surveyor, bookmending assistant, and Documents Department and Special Project worker in University of California Library (sounds dull but is actually duller) . . ." If this sounds like book-jacket blurb stuff, good: Carr has just sold his first novel, and is working on two more in his Greenwich Village apartment. And now—How To Succeed In Hell Without Really Trying . . .*

WHO SUPS WITH THE DEVIL

by Terry Carr

"I'VE SEEN THROUGH YOUR LITtle game, you know," said John Ellsworth Gaines.

"Ah," said the Devil, scratching primly behind his ear with the tip of his tail. "And how is that?"

"Contracts such as this," said John Ellsworth Gaines, indicating the parchment spread before them on the table, "are not as binding as your stories have made them out to be."

"My stories?" said the Devil.

"Yes indeed, your stories," said

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John Ellsworth Gaines, who was a short, red-haired man in his middle thirties. "You see, I've been reading up on this subject—compacts with the Devil and so forth." He inclined his head briefly to the dapper gentleman across the table from him.

"Ah," said the Devil. "A little basic research?"

"Quite right. You use the term facetiously, I realize, but it is valid. Basic research, the scientific method—what better way to deal with the Devil?"

"What better way indeed?" murmured His Satanic Majesty.

"So I have taken up scholasticism as a sideline this past year. And I've discovered some very interesting facts about you." John Ellsworth Gaines leaned forward in his chair, causing the light from the single table-lamp in the small room to move dark shadows across his ruddy face. "I have discovered, for instance, that your business dealings have not always been as profitable for you as I had at first thought."

"I've had my difficulties at times," the Devil admitted mildly.

"As a matter of fact," continued John Ellsworth Gaines, "for many centuries you had extremely few successful cases. Lost almost all, it seems, when it came time to collect the souls. Of course, most of the stories involved some sort of Divine Intervention, but I don't think it's necessary to assume that. The people of the Middle Ages were, after all, quite in a rut as regarded their way of thinking."

"Ah," said the Devil. "I remember that."

"I believe," said John Ellsworth Gaines, "that you proved over and over again to be a poor student of law." (The Devil raised an eyebrow, but said nothing.) "In case after case you were defeated. In fact, not once, up until the time of Dr. Faust, can I find evidence of your having collected a soul for which you had bargained."

"Those were lean years," said the Devil.

"Lean years indeed," said John Ellsworth Gaines. "Here, let me show you something." He rose and went to a shelf of books, returning with a rather bedraggled volume of some age. He set this in front of his guest, opened it to a marked page, and standing behind him pointed over his shoulder at a particular passage. "This is James Russell Lowell, writing in 1882. See the passage here about you: 'One is tempted to ask, Were there no attorneys, then, in the place he came from, of whom he might have taken advice beforehand? On the whole, he had rather hard measure, and it is a wonder he did not throw up the business in disgust.'"

"Hmm," said the Devil.

John Ellsworth Gaines closed the book and returned it to his shelf. He waved a hand to indicate

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the rest of his library. "There is more here—documented cases, trials of witches and sorcerers and the like. But Lowell sums up the matter quite clearly. It is obvious that you have proven yourself over and over again to be totally incompetent at law. No offense meant, of course—I'm merely stating the results of my research."

His Satanic Majesty waved a taloned hand in a mild gesture, and shrugged. "I wouldn't think of arguing the point," he said. "You're quite right."

"Thank you," said John Ellsworth Gaines. "Now, considering this, what am I to think of the stories prevalent in more recent years? Stories of your extreme cleverness and subtlety, of the way you have proven over and over again that your contracts are unbreakable."

"Perhaps I have changed?" suggested the Devil, with a dark smile touching his lips.

"I doubt it," said John Ellsworth Gaines. "Your whole psychological history has been one of stubborn immutability—you have far too much faith in your own abilities. You are, in a word, egocentric."

"You may be right," said the Devil carelessly. "A little power is, after all, a dangerous thing—sometimes even for he who has it."

"Another of my studies has been psychology," said John Ellsworth Gaines. "Particularly, of course, as applied to you. You are rather a classical type, you know . . . with interesting complications. Rejection of the father figure, of course—but with no mother to turn to. And the implications of sibling rivalry inherent in your continuing battle with the Son of God . . ."

"I don't think we need discuss that," said the Devil shortly.

"Still," said his host, "it would be fascinating to do a fullscale psychological study of you. Your sex-life, for instance . . ."

"It has been varied," said the Devil. "The witches were not the only ones, of course. And there are passions of which your wildest heretics had only the slightest hints."

John Ellsworth Gaines regarded him closely under the light, and at length shrugged. "It is perhaps beside the point. We were speaking of your psychology simply because I believe that you reject all but yourself. And in this you have limited yourself, so that I simply do not believe that suddenly, after millenia, you could have mastered a subject that was so obviously beyond you. It would require too deep an insight into relationships between people and the rights of others."

"That has certainly never been my strong point," the Devil admitted.

"But there *are* those stories which have circulated in recent

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years," said the other. "Is it possible to assume that they are anything but propaganda? I think you have deliberately *caused* such stories to be circulated, in order to build up a reputation for yourself as an invincible opponent in contractual agreements."

The Devil frowned slightly. "I don't quite see your point. Why should I want to think of me as an invincible opponent? Surely that would forestall them from coming to me with their business."

"On the contrary," said John Ellsworth Gaines, "I don't think anything could cause a decline in your business; it seems to have a perennial attraction for mankind. We all crave wealth, women, success . . . and we are willing to go to great lengths in the pursuit of them." Even to the extent of selling our souls for them."

"I've noticed that," said the Devil. "Unfortunately, so many men sell their souls directly to women instead. That *is* a problem, you know." His surprisingly youthful face fell into the attitude of reverie. "Helen of Troy, for instance . . . She had a quite fascinating birthmark on her right breast . . ." After a moment he looked up. "I assure you that it was not her *face* that launched a thousand ships."

"Nevertheless," said John Ellsworth Gaines, "despite any such problems you may have had I'm sure you have never had to fear a . . . shall we say . . . recession, in your line. Rather, the only thing you need fear is being beaten out of the souls for which you bargain. And it seems obvious, knowing your background, that your recent propagandizing is aimed at quenching all hope in the hearts of those with whom you do business, so that they will feel it useless to try to outwit you. Thus, you are saved the inconvenience of legal battles to collect your fee —contests which you have found from experience so often so against you."

"Truth to tell," smiled the Devil, "there hasn't been such a case in court for well over a century."

"Then you admit that what I have said is true!" said John Ellsworth Gaines, standing up and leaning over the table.

"A very great deal of it is true," said the Devil mildly, inserting a cigaret in his long holder. He struck a talon against the bottom of one cloven hoof and watched it flare into flame.

John Ellsworth Gaines placed the tip of his finger on the document on the table as the Devil lit his cigaret. "Have you read the fine print?" he asked.

"Yes, I have," said the Devil. "It seems quite acceptable to me. In fact, I have signed it already." He stood up, exhaling a stream of smoke smelling faintly of both sulfur and menthol. "And now," he said, "will *you* sign? This has real-

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ly been very diverting, but as you say, there is no recession in my business, and I'm afraid I have other appointments."

"You are willing to make the contract, in spite of the fact that I know all that I have told you?" said John Ellsworth Gaines.

The Devil shrugged. "My services cost me little inconvenience. At any rate, I've already signed. Now—will you?"

John Ellsworth Gaines hesitated, and the Devil smiled.

"Mr. Gaines," he said, "you drew up that document yourself, and you have just spent the better part of an hour bragging to me of your discoveries about me—yet still you hesitate. Why is this?" His eyes narrowed and his lips drew back in what might have been a half-smile. "Could it be that you have merely summoned me in order to tell me of your discoveries, with no intentions of consummating any bargain? Perhaps you thought I would be afraid to sign after finding out that you knew my secret. But as I say, my services are quite easy for me to perform. Now, have you enough conviction to sign?"

John Ellsworth Gaines frowned. He turned and paced the small room twice; then he looked directly at his guest. "You are trying to frighten me," he said.

"And are you frightened, Mr. Gaines?" said the Devil, extending a sharp quill to him.

There was only the slightest hint of any further indecision, and then he said, "No!"—and taking the quill he jabbed himself (rather clumsily) in the wrist and signed his name with bold strokes on the parchment.

"Thank you very much," said the Devil, bowing. "Now, as I say, I must be off to another appointment."

John Ellsworth Gaines laughed, a trifle recklessly, his eyes narrowed and his head cocked. "I don't think you'll find your business to have been very profitable in my case," he said boldly. "You see, in addition to my other studies, I have spent the last fifteen years of my life studying and practicing law. I have a quite thorough knowledge of the subject, I assure you."

The Devil looked intently at him over his shoulder. "I am quite aware of that," he said. "As a matter of fact, your references are overwhelming—I don't see how I could afford to get along without your services as, ah, Devil's Advocate. You have spent nearly a lifetime studying my problems, and seem to have an incisive insight into them. Under the circumstances, I shall make sure you are on my side when the time comes."

John Ellsworth Gaines' head jerked up. "But you can't—"

"Oh, I can, I can," smiled the Devil. "I assure you, in special cases I am simply prepared to

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cheat." The flames of Hell rose about him as he stood in the middle of the room, his gaze transfixing his client. "Yes, quite prepared," he murmured as the flames roared up and then disappeared.

John Ellsworth Gaines' vision was clouded by the after-image of those flames for many long minutes.

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There are none so blind (the Bible reminds us) as those who will not see. For many years, disguised as a technical editor for a pharmaceutical house, James Blish—than whom few people see better—observed a certain facet of the Manhattan scene with camera-keen eyes. At the end of each week he donned his white crash-helmet and motorcycled back to his home in Milford, Pennsylvania, his wife and collaborator (writer Virginia Kidd), and their three children; where the filth and fury of the New York Island was replaced by clean and sylvan quietness . . . through which, however, the memory of the blind beggars of Manhattan, like so many mute mimics of Tiresias, wandered in mystery, disquiet, and reproach . . . And then the author of THE SEEDLING STARS, Hugo Award-winning A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, THE FROZEN YEARS, THE OATH (F&SF, Oct., 1960), THE MASKS (F&SF, Nov., 1959), and a treasure-house of other excellent stories, sat down and wrote this perceptive account of hucksters and hawkers and others who toil darkly in the long and blazing noon.

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

by James Blish

THE EARLY MOTT STREET morning was misty, but that would burn off later; it was going to be a hot day in New York. The double doors of the boarded-up shop swung inward with a grating noise, and a black-and-white tomcat bolted out of an overflowing garbage can next door and slid beneath a parked car. It was safe there: the car had been left in distress two days ago, and since then the neighborhood kids had removed three tires and the engine.

After that nothing moved for a while. At last, a preternaturally

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clean old man, neatly dressed in very clean rags, came out of the dark chill interior of the shop with a kettle heaped with freshly fired charcoal, which he set on the sidewalk. Straightening, he took a good long look at the day, exposing his cleanliness, the sign of his reclamation from the Bowery two blocks away, to the unkind air. Then he scuffled back into the cave with a bubbly sigh; he would next see the day tomorrow morning at the same time, if it didn't rain. Behind him, the bucket of charcoal sent up petals of yellow flame, in the midst of which the briquets nestled like dragon's eggs, still unhatched.

Now emerged the hot-dog wagons, three of them, one by one, their blue-and-orange striped parasols bobbing stiffly, pushed by men in stiff caps. The men helped themselves to charcoal from the bucket, to heat the franks (all meat) and the sauerkraut (all cabbage) and the rolls (all sawdust). Behind them came the fruit pushcarts, and then two carts heaped with the vegetables of the district: minute artichokes for three cents each, Italian tomatoes, eggplants in all sizes, zucchini, peppers, purple onions.

When the pushcarts were all gone the street was quiet again, but the cat stayed underneath the late-model wreck at the curb. It was waiting for the dogs, who after a while emerged with their men: scrubby yellowish animals with long foxy noses and plumy tails carried low, hitched to the men with imaginative networks of old imitation-alligator belts and baby-carriage straps. There was also one authentic German shepherd who wore an authentic rigid Seeing-Eye harness; the man he was pulling was a powerfully built Negro who was already wearing his sign:

PRAY IN YOUR OWN WAY
EVERY DAY
TAKE A PRAYER-CARD—
THEY'RE FREE
I AM BLIND
THANK YOU

The others still carried their signs under their arms, though all were wearing their dark glasses. They paused to sniff at the day.

"Pretty good," said the man with the German shepherd. "Let's go. And don't any of you bastards be late back."

The others mumbled, and then they too filed off toward Houston Street, where the bums were already in motion toward the Volunteers of America shop, hoping to pick up a little heavy lifting to buy cigarettes with. The bums avoided the dogs very scrupulously. The dogs pulled the men west and down the 60 steps of the Broadway-Lafayette IND station to the F train, which begins there, and they all sat together in the rear car. There was almost no talking, but

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one of the men already had his transistor radio going, filling the car with an hysterical mixture of traffic reports and rock-and-roll.

The cat stayed under the late-model wreck; it was now time for the children to burst out of the church and charge toward the parochial school across the street, screaming and pummelling each other with their prayer-books.

Another clean old man took in the empty charcoal bucket and the doors closed.

The dogs pulled the men out of the F train at the 47th-50th Street station on Sixth Avenue, which is the Rockefeller Center stop; they emerged, however, at the 47th Street end, which is almost squarely in the middle of Manhattan's diamond mart. Here they got out their cups, each of which contained a quarter to shake, and hung on their signs; then they moved singly, at five minute intervals, one block north, and then slowly east.

The signs were all metal, hung at belt level, front and back, and all were black with greenish-yellow lettering. The calligraphy was also the same: curlique capitals, like the upper case of that type font known as Hobo.

The messages, however, were varied, though they had obvious similarities in style. The one following the man with the German shepherd and the prayer-cards, for instance, said:

GOD BLESS YOU
YOU CAN SEE
AND I CAN'T
THANK YOU

Slowly they deployed along 48th Street toward Fifth Avenue, which was already teeming with people, though it was only 10:00 A.M. At the Fifth Avenue end, which is marked by Black, Starr and Gorham, a phenomenally expensive purveyor of such luxuries as one-fork-of-a-kind sterling, an old blind woman in the uniform of the Lighthouse sat behind a table on which was a tambourine, playing a guitar and whining out a hymn. A dog lay at her feet. Only a few feet away, still in front of one of Black, Starr and Gorham's show windows, was a young man with a dog, standing with a guitar, singing rock-and-roll at the top of his voice. Two blocks up Fifth Avenue, at the terrace of Rockefeller Center, two women and a man in Salvation Army uniforms played hymns on three trumpets in close harmony (a change from yesterday, when that stand had been occupied only by an Army officer with a baritone sax-horn which he could barely play), but they didn't matter—the men weren't working Rockefeller Center any more; having already done for that area.

The dogs ignored the old woman and the rock-and-roller as well, and so did the men. They never

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sang. The man with the transistor radio turned it up a little when he worked that end of the block.

The street filled still further. As it got on toward a blistering noon, the travellers that counted came out: advertising agency account men ("—and when the client's sales forecast was under ours by fifteen per cent they went and cut the budget on us, and now poor old Jim's got his yacht posted for sale in the men's room"), the middle echelons of editors from important weekly news magazines (with the latest dirty verses about their publishers), literary agents playing musical chairs ("—went to S&S and took Zuck Stamler with him with twenty-five per cent of the contract and an option clause bound in purest brass") and an occasional bewildered opinion-maker from the trade press ("—a buck eighty-five for *spaghetti?*"). None of these ever dropped a coin in the cups, but the dogs were not disturbed; they walked their men in the heat.

I MAY SEE AGAIN
WITH A TRANSPLANT EYE
GOD BLESS YOU

The travellers settled in the St. Germain and the Three G's, except for the trade press, which took refuge in the American Bar. Secretaries stopped outside the restaurants, looked at the menus, looked at each other indignantly and swung up Fifth toward Stouffer's, where they would be charged just as much. The match-players said "Viva-la!" and "Law of averages!" and "That's a good call," and damned the Administration. The girl account exec had one Martini more and told the man from the client something he had suspected for five months and was not glad to hear; the agency would not be glad to hear it either, but it never would. Rogers and Whitehead, Authors Representatives (they had never been able to decide where the apostrophe should go) had shad roe and bacon and decided to drop all their Western authors, of whom they had three. The president and editor-in-chief of the largest magazine enterprise in the world decided to run for president after all.

The men listened and shook their cups and walked their dogs. The transistor radio reported that the news was worse today.

At 3 P.M. the temperature was 92 degrees, the humidity 40 per cent, the T.H.I. 80. The German shepherd pulled his man back toward Sixth. The other dogs followed. At the token booth the cups were checked: there was enough money to get home on. Along 48th, the restaurants emptied, leaving behind a thick miasma of smoke, tomato sauce and disastrous decisions. Tomorrow they would do for 47th St., where the Public Relations types gathered.

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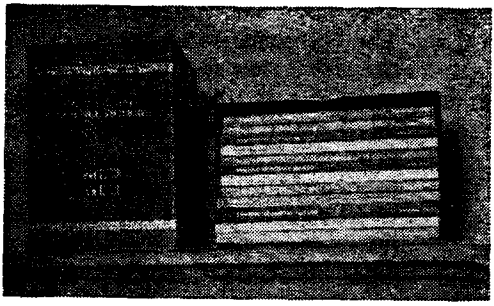
The cave on Mott Street was relatively cool. The men took off their signs and sat down. The radio said something about Khrushchev, something about Cuba, and something about beer.

"Not a bad day," the big man said finally. "Lot's of jangle. Did you hear that guy with the three kids decide to quit?"

The man with the radio reported: "Goin' to rain tomorrow."

"It is?" the big man said. "Hell, that's no good." He thought for a while, and then, getting deliberately to his feet, he crossed the dark chill room and kicked the German shepherd. "Who's in charge here?" The dog looked back sullenly. Satisfied, the man went back and sat down.

"Nah," he said. "It won't rain."



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Those dry cylindrical objects dropping out of the great clock so regularly, so remorselessly—should they mean anything to a weary old man?

HAWK IN THE DUSK

by William Bankier

NAPIER HAGBART HAD TAKEN his pill and had gone to bed, lowering a hundred and twenty pounds of cold bone and tissue onto the bare cot that covered almost half the floor area of the tiny room.

Below him and to the left, seventeen rooms of ornate furniture lay smothered in dust and silence. Twenty years ago, those rooms had sparkled with light and bloomed with the aroma of peonies and lemon oil and they had even rung with a certain amount of laughter when Hagbart was out of the house. In those days, a sullen maid used to mop and polish her way through those great rooms and then creep up the narrow stairs after supper to lay herself down on the same cot that supported Napier Hagbart's frame tonight.

Then one year, Paula Hagbart, blessed with her mother's disposition and penalized by the inheritance of old Napier's rock jaw and crevice mouth, announced that she intended to marry a young teacher from the nearby agricultural college. She was 19 years old. Hagbart retaliated by striking her name from his will and followed through by cancelling her dowry. But the young couple were wed in spite of him and they settled down across town in a small apartment.

Left alone in the great old house with the prospect of living out her years in the sole company of her husband, Serena Hagbart took sick and died of an ailment which her doctor could diagnose as nothing more nor less than dismay.

After the funeral, Napier dismissed the maid with minimum wages, docking her half a day for the morning she spent at Mrs. Hagbart's graveside. Then he carried his belongings up the narrow stair-

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way to the tiny room at the far corner of the house and settled down to live out his time.

It was a bare, oblong cell with a high ceiling. One narrow end of the room was occupied by a large window which Hagbart kept locked at all times against the entry of harsh vapours that might originate on the surface of the silver river at the foot of the hill and float upward through the branches of the black pines that lined the ridge. The opposite wall was a backdrop for a tall grandfather's clock, a sombre mahogany monster with a flat, pale face and a hypnotic pendulum that swung to and fro with an ominous tuck, tuck, tuck.

One long wall contained the doorway, a mahogany bureau and a wooden chair. The other was covered by Hagbart's cot. When Napier Hagbart stood up, the room was almost full.

The great clock had just struck nine, rasping out the notes from a cracked brass chime, when Hagbart reached up and pulled the cord that extinguished the overhead bulb. As always, before settling down into the bed, he remained propped on one elbow, staring out his window into the pale orange and blue and grey of the night sky. He was watching for a bird, a ritual he had followed all his life. When he was a boy, he used to stare into other distant skies and watch for a night hawk to describe some movement the definition of which could be interpreted as promising bright events for the morrow. Of late, though, his skinny arm could hold him only a short while before the pain forced him to lie down, so there was less and less time to look for birds.

Tonight, however, just before his aching arm demanded release, a dark shape flew up from out of the pines and hovered against a pale cloud formation before plummeting down towards the river. A smile crossed the face of Napier Hagbart and he relaxed onto the pillow with a sigh. As he sank into sleep, his mind followed the lone bird as it dipped across the silver river and skimmed the reeds on the far shore.

The sound that awakened Napier Hagbart was not easy to identify. It was a rustling, crackling sound, sometimes followed by the click of an object hitting the linoleum covered floor. He lay in the dark, holding his breath, listening. The rustling, clicking, bouncing noise continued, somehow coordinated with the tuck, tuck, tuck of the grandfather's clock. For a hundred and twenty seconds, Hagbart lay still and waited for the foreign sound to cease. It did not. In fact, at one point, a sudden rustling, shifting noise from the floor indicated some sort of accumulation.

There came a time when further waiting was intolerable. Fumbling for the cord, Hagbart snapped on the light. For a few

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moments, he was blinded by the glare. Then, when he could see, there was a further brief passage of time before he could identify the source of the sound. Then he saw it.

From the face of the great clock, right at the centre spot where the hands joined, a small, cylindrical object appeared and dropped onto the floor. Another followed, and another. They came in a steady flow, a little greater in frequency than the swinging of the pendulum. Sometimes they fell directly to the floor. Other times, their progress impeded by the movement of the second hand, two or three would pile up and drop simultaneously. Peering over the edge of the cot, Hagbart saw a large mound of the things covering the floor and obscuring the base of the clock to a depth of more than a foot. Whatever was happening, it had been going on for some time.

Then a sudden thought struck the old man and made the tiny bristles of hair on his pale skin stand erect in revulsion. What if these objects were alive, some sort of termites or worms finding their way into the clock from a rotting partition and invading his room in this bizarre manner?

Leaning over the edge of the cot, Hagbart was able to scrutinize one of the things at close range. It did not appear to be alive. Finally, after watching it for some minutes, during which time it lay perfectly still, he summoned the courage to pick it up.

It was a brown hollow object about three inches long and ¾ of an inch in diameter. Contrary to his first appraisal, the thing was not completely cylindrical but had an odd shape to it; not a symmetrical pattern but a definite narrowing at one end and a sort of curved seam as if it had been folded and sealed. The material involved was beyond Hagbart's experience. It was very light in weight, brown in colour, smooth textured, with a sort of lacquered gloss and, withal, a mummified look of great age. In a way, the little shape reminded Hagbart of the dried body of a dead grasshopper when all the organic matter has decomposed leaving nothing but the exterior skeleton.

On an impulse, the old man squeezed the thing between his bony fingers. It resisted the pressure only momentarily, then crumbled into brittle shards and fell to the counterpane. Hagbart whisked the crumbs away and then lay back upon the pillow. He regarded the clock where the strange dry shells were popping out one after the other. It was three-thirty in the morning. Then his gaze fell to the swinging pendulum and, lulled by its hypnotic rhythm, he fell asleep.

For some reason, Napier Hagbart slept hours past his normal

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time of awakening. When he opened his eyes again he was staring directly into the baleful face of the clock which indicated the hour of ten. The room was full of light from the window and the overhead bulb burned dimly by comparison. He pulled the cord and extinguished it.

Then he noticed the level of the objects falling from the clock and his heart skipped inside his flat chest. They now covered the entire floor almost to the level of the cot. And still they dropped steadily from the round, pale face, oozing from the central spot, tumbling to the pile, rolling and clicking each to its random resting place. Panic popped beads of cold sweat onto Hagbart's shiny forehead. He would have to do something. But he could not bring himself to step out of bed into that brown, clicking mass of hollow husks that seemed to press and move about him now like some slow tide in a thick sea. He could imagine them crunching beneath his bare feet and pressing against his calves and the idea was too much. The most he could do was reach to the far wall where he grasped the wooden chair and pulled it over and onto the bed.

Not a moment too soon. For as he stood the chair up and balanced it against the wall, several of the things rattled over the end of the bed and came to rest in the hollow where the old man had been lying a moment before. Climbing onto the seat, Hagbart hooked his heels onto one of the rungs and wrapped his night-shirted arms about his knees.

There was time now to think and Napier Hagbart began to wonder about the odd little shells that were dropping so mysteriously from the face of his grandfather's clock. What could they be? They were not alive. Therefore they were not making their own way into the clock from some outside source. So they must be coming from the clock itself.

But what sort of thing, what product, was manufactured by a clock? Time?

A thought ocurred to Hagbart and with it an uneasy pang made itself felt in the pit of his stomach. He watched the clock and waited till the second hand pointed straight up. Then he began counting the objects as they fell. When the second hand pointed straight up again, he had his total: 60. In one minute the clock produced exactly 60 of these dry, brown husks.

Could they be seconds? Was the clock measuring out the lifeless corpses of passing time? If so, whose time was it? The answer to that question seemed all too plain. It was his clock, the room was his, and he was the only person present. If these hollow, worthless images were the seconds of a life, they were surely his own.

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The realization had a depressing effect on the old man. He lowered his small white head onto his forearms and closed his eyes, a curled up snail of a man perched on the chair above the cot. When he opened his eyes again a considerable period of time had passed and the brown shells now covered the bed to a depth of at least three inches.

Curiosity regarding the strange objects gripped him again and Napier Hagbart reached down from the chair and picked one of them up. It appeared to be exactly the same as the one he had inspected earlier; almost weightless, delicately folded and joined in a spiral seam, dry and hollow and shining with the dull lacquer finish that reminded Hagbart of ancient caskets he had seen exhibited in some museum.

Then something different caught his eye, a faint inscription which had escaped his notice before. It ran lengthwise, just below the seam. Squinting at the shell held just at the thin tip of his nose, Hagbart made out the numerals, 83,670. Here was a new element in the mystery. Dropping the shell back onto the pile, he picked up another and searched it for numerals. He found them in the same place: 83,600.

So, the things were numbered. Some of Hagbart's panic left him as he considered this new factor. Why would the odd little images have figures stamped on them, like serial numbers on some machined product? He picked up another and checked its inscription; 50,257. A smaller number. But this one had come from the other side of the chair, closer to the end of the bed, nearer the clock which was their source. Should not the number be a higher one?

The Hagbart mind was still remarkably acute. An idea occurred to him. Leaning as far as he could towards the end of the room, and bracing one arm against the wall, he was able to extend the other arm close to the base of the clock. The shells reached a peak here, and rolled down the little slope to other parts of the room. By nimble finger work, Hagbart was able to grasp a couple of the newest as they rattled past.

Pushing himself back to a sitting position, he studied their numbers. They were 43,315, and 43,314. The shells were being produced in declining sequence of numbers!

With this new piece of information to consider, Napier Hagbart sat up and did some calculation. The meaning of the episode seemed clear to him now. The clock was measuring out the seconds of his life and would, presumably, count down the thousands and hundreds to the number one, and then zero. At which time, it would seem to follow, his life would end.

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Mental arithmetic had always been one of Hagbart's skills. Now he began breaking down the larger figure into minutes and hours, simplifying the problem by starting with an even 43,000. Figuring 3600 seconds per hour and cancelling out zeros, he ended up with an answer of something over eleven hours. Was this to be the extent of his life? Taking a deep breath, the old man checked himself mentally for signs of decay or malfunction. He felt fine. He had never been sick a day in his life. Surely he was not going to die at 64 years of age merely because a clock said he would!

Then the fact came home to him very clearly. Of course he would die, because by the time another 43,000 seconds had spilled from the clock, they would fill the room close to the ceiling and he would drown in the dry corpses of his own expired time!

The instinct for survival bubbled and threshed to the surface within Hagbart's frame. He must do what he should have done hours ago. Get to the door and open it and escape into the body of the house. There was capacity there to contain the damned things forever. Without another thought, Napier Hagbart stepped forward and plunged into the grinding brown sea.

The sensation was repulsive in the extreme. Whereas the shells, taken individually, were inert, as a body they seemed to possess some talent for movement, a slow swelling and subsiding, a rising and falling in gentle undulations that suggested the presence of some sort of life.

Hagbart found himself immersed up to the chest in this uncomfortable ocean, his arms spread out across the surface, his feet unable to penetrate to the floor. Forward motion among the sliding shells was almost impossible. Instead, Hagbart found himself sinking further into the stuff, which absorbed his movements like some swamp of dry quicksand.

The hopelessness of the effort soon came home to the old man and he made his way back to the chair while it was still within reach. The seat of the chair was now covered with the shells so there was nothing else for it. He had to climb onto the chair and stand on the seat, his back braced against the wall for support.

And so the morning passed and the early hours of the afternoon while the level of the spent seconds climbed past Hagbart's knees and reached the region of his hips. Napier passed the time alternately dozing and thinking back through the years for some clue as to why this should be happening to him. He had never heard of anybody else dying this way and his selection as the subject for such a gross experiment seemed highly unjust.

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By early evening, when the rays of the sun began to find their way through what was left of the window, Napier Hagbart was feeling the pangs of hunger. This, in itself, seemed odd what with death so close upon him. The shells were about his chest now and he had his arms spread out across the surface. Standing was easy because the pressure of the things held his body erect.

A recent ejection from the clock rolled close to Hagbart's hand and he picked it up. The number was 4301; something over an hour to go.

There was little to look at now. On the right, the dour face of the clock spewing out its clicking shells; on the left, the small rectangle of glass glinting with the last rays of the sun. Hagbart found himself straining to see a bird, but the glare of the sun obscured his view. He was not to be permitted a final flight over the silver river.

Suddenly there sprang into his mind the image of a red tricycle, the kind a little girl would ride. He saw it on the sidewalk outside their house on a warm summer day. Seated on it, now, was Paula Hagbart, a thin elf of a girl, erect over the handle bars, the soft waves of her brown hair flowing over her shoulders and down her straight back.

Then she was off the trike and running into the great house and Hagbart saw himself carrying the vehicle into the house and setting it down in the darkest recess of the hall closet. It was a punishment. He could not recall the offense now but he did remember the months and years that followed. Paula had never asked for the tricycle again and he had never offered it to her. So she had gone through her childhood without the use of it and the thing must still be stored away where he had put it on that day.

The dried shells shifted and pressed up under Hagbart's armpits as more seconds dropped from the tall clock. The memory of the little girl's erect figure on the new tricycle would not erase itself from Napier's mind and a great pang of remorse tugged at his innards as he contemplated the vision. On how many other occasions had he denied the girl what should have been her right; pleasures and privileges which, once withdrawn, could never be replaced?

A great sense of urgency seized Napier Hagbart at this moment. He could visualize the locked safe in the room below and, in it, the last will and testament leaving all his wealth to obscure foundations. All this had to be changed. But how? Time was running out; worse, his final seconds were weighing in upon him, due to crush out his life within the hour.

The faculties of an alert mind did not desert Hagbart in this late hour. Extending one hand as high

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as he could, he found he was able to reach the dull plaster ceiling. With fumbling fingers, he unfastened a large safety pin that clasped the collar of his nightshirt. In his excitment the old man scarcely felt the pain as he thrust the point of the pin into the ball of his thumb and squeezed a crimson drop of blood to the surface.

"Tuck, tuck, tuck," said the great clock, its hollow voice muffled beneath thousands of the empty seconds of its owner's life.

Squinting up at the ceiling, Hagbart carried a drop of blood up on the tip of the pin and scratched the letters in a thin line. It was slow going and it required additional punctures to obtain the necessary crimson ink. But finally it was done. In spidery script upon the shabby ceiling, the claret message stood out:

> August 8, 1961. To Paula, all my worldly goods.
>
> Napier Hagbart

An immense feeling of satisfaction and relief swept through the old man as he observed his work. Then the shells shifted and rolled and a new level reached almost to his chin. With the hand nearest the clock, Hagbart selected the most recent emission and held it close to his eyes. Thirty-one!

Good heavens, so close? He had finished just in time. Well, good bye, Paula. Too bad there had not been occasion for a final visit and a talk. So little time now for anything. Hagbart turned his eyes towards the window . . . nothing there now but darkness at the thin slit of visible glass. Of course, it must be late in the night. Looking back at the clock, he saw both hands perpendicular; nearly midnight. A heavy wave of fatigue flowed over the old man. This feels more like it, he thought.

Catching another shell as it rolled from the clock, he scrutinized it. Number eight! Well, he would soon know what it was all about. Watching the clock face intently, he counted his last seconds as they appeared: five, four, three, two, one . . . and that was all.

Napier Hagbart waited and watched for a few moments to see what would happen. But there were no seconds left to fall upon him from the clock, so with a deep sigh, he closed his eyes.

Then the clock began to strike, but instead of the harsh, tuneless clang that had been its voice before, now it sang out in notes of pure silver. Majestically they mounted to the number twelve, and as each tone rang out, a stream of golden drops sprayed from the face of the clock and fell upon the upturned forehead of the old man. Hagbart did not open his eyes, but he could feel the cool annointing of the golden drops.

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Some of them fell on his closed eyelids and some splashed over his dry lips. These he gathered with his tongue and their taste was of honey and fine wine.

Then, after the final stroke of twelve, there was a pause, an absolute silence unbroken even by the tuck, tuck, tuck of the pendulum which was now stilled forever . . .

By purest chance, Paula Hagbart called on her father the following afternoon and found the door of his room locked tight. She summoned help and two police officers came. After forcing their way into the room, they sent for an Inspector.

Later, alone with Paula, he asked, "Have you any idea why your father would stand on a chair and write his will on the ceiling in blood?"

"He was a lonely old man," was all Paula could say. "I should have visited him more often."

"Well, you have a lot of friends in this town, Miss Hagbart. And Napier had a bit of a reputation as an eccentric. Chances are the court will recognize this as his true wish and you'll end up with this house and all the money."

"The money would be useful. I've never cared for the house."

As they prepared to leave, the Inspector drew a small brown object from his pocket and showed it to Paula. "Ever seen one of these before?"

She studied it, shook her head.

"We found several of them under the body, on the floor. Looks like a dried bug to me."

Paula left the room and stood at the head of the stairs. The Inspector stayed behind a moment. It was a pleasant evening, and the room could use an airing. He thrust the sash up half way, then left. There was no breeze at that moment, and yet, the threadbare curtain stirred gently, as if something had left the room for the cool evening air outside—something which might even then be winging its way slowly over the black pines in search of the night birds; might fly with them, perhaps, that very night, as they dipped across the surface of the silver river and skimmed the reeds on the distant shore.

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When the task of gathering data becomes a bit more than our limited time allows (e are also handicapped by having lost four of our six arms in a motor-car accident many years ago), we generally call upon the services of our ace agent, Mr. Pettifogle. We quote from a recent report:

"Contributor small a stroke three three point five [Pettifogle speaking] capital N. William F. Nolan, 34, single. Free-lancer, full time. Four hardcover books (G.P. Putnam's Sons, N.Y.), the latest—Barney Oldfield—first bio of this famous old racing driver. Short story (THE RAGGED EDGE) included in high-school text ADVENTURES FOR AMERICANS (Harcourt-Brace, N.Y., /62). Anthology appearances include THIRD PLAYBOY ANTHOLOGY and HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY SAMPLER. Mostly writes in automotive field (ROAD AND TRACK, CAR AND DRIVER, & c.), but has sold fiction to mystery and men's magazines, as well as Stf. (THE SHIP, in collab. with Charles Fritch, F&SF, June /56). Has written TV and (in collab. with F&SF regular Rich'd Matheson) the all-cartoon pic ALI BABA AND THE SEVEN MARVELS OF THE WORLD. Is rated as one of 'top twelve' writers in auto field. Has been Stf. fan for many years (RAY BRADBURY REVIEW, /52). For crysake don't omit the 'F' from his name, on acc't there is another *Bill Nolan in the writing game." [Pettifogle also submitted a tab for a box of Marsh Wheeling stogies and three pitchers of steam beer, which our comptroller disallowed.] And now you will wish to move on to this literary seven-layer cake about a musical butterfly, an infantophile cat, a camel with bad teeth, a were-seal, and a shaggy, shaggy dog.*

ONE OF THOSE DAYS

by William F. Nolan

I KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE one of those days when I heard a blue-and-yellow butterfly humming *Si, mi chiamano Mimi,* my favorite aria from *La Boheme.* I was weeding the garden when the

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papery insect fluttered by, humming beautifully.

I got up, put aside my garden tools and went into the house to dress. I would see my psychoanalyst at once.

Neglecting my cane and spats, I snapped an old homburg on my head and aimed for Dr. Mellowthin's office in downtown Los Angeles.

Several disturbing things happened to me on the way . . .

First of all, a large stippled Tomcat darted out of an alley directly after I'd stepped from the bus. The cat was on its hind legs and carried a bundle of frothy pink blanketing in its front paws. It looked desperate.

"Gangway!" shouted the cat. "Baby! Live baby here! Clear back. BACK for the baby!"

Then it was gone, having dipped cat-quick across the street, losing itself in heavy traffic. Upon drawing in a deep lungful of air, smog-laden but steadying, I resumed my brisk pace toward Dr. Mellowthin's office.

As I passed a familiar apartment house a third-storey window opened and Wally Jenks popped his head over the sill and called down to me. "Hi," yelled Wally. "C'mon up for a little drinkie."

I shaded my eyes to get a clearer look at him. "Hi, Jenks!" I yelled back, and we both grinned foolishly at the old play on words. "On my way to Mellowthin's."

"Appointment?" he queried.

"Spur of the moment," I replied.

"Then time's no problem. Up you come, old dads, or I shan't forgive you."

I sighed and entered the building. Jenks was in 3G, and I decided to use the stairs. Elevators trap you. As I reached the second-floor landing I obeyed an irresistible urge to bend down and place my ear close to the base of the wall near the floor.

"Are you mice still *in* there?" I shouted.

To which a thousand tiny musical Disney-voices shot back: "Damned *right* we are!"

I shrugged, adjusted my homburg, and continued my upward climb. Jenks met me at the door with a dry martini.

"Thanks," I said, sipping. As usual, it was superb. Old Wally knew his martinis.

"Well," he said, all cheer, "how goes?"

"Badsville," I answered. "Care to hear?"

"By all means. Unburden."

We sat down, facing one another across the tastefully furnished room. I sipped the martini and told Wally about things. "This morning, bout forty minutes ago, I heard a butterfly humming Puccini. Then I saw a cat carrying what I can only assume was a live baby."

"Human?"

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"Don't know. Could have been a cat baby."

"Cat say anything?"

"He shouted 'Gangway!' "

"Proceed."

"Then—on the way upstairs—I had a brief conversational exchange with at least a thousand mice."

"In the walls?"

"Where else?"

"Finish your drinkie," said Jenks, finishing his.

I did so.

"Nother?" he asked.

"Nope. Gotta be trotting. I'm in for a mental purge."

"Well, I wouldn't worry too much," he assured me. "Humming insects, talking felines and oddball answering mice are admittedly unsettling. But . . . there *are* stranger things in this man's world."

I looked over at him. And knew he was correct—for old Wally Jenks had turned into a loose-pelted brown camel with twin humps, all stained and worn-looking at the tops. I swallowed.

"See you," I said.

Wally grinned, or rather the camel did, and it was awful. Long, cracked yellow teeth like old carnival dishes inside his black gums. I gave a nervous little half-wave, and moved for the door. One final glance over my shoulder at old Jenks verified the fact that he was still grinning at me with those big wet desert-red eyes of his.

Back on the street I quickened my stride, anxious now to reach Mellowthin and render a full account of the day's events. Only a half-block to go.

Then a policeman stopped me. He was all sweaty inside his tight uniform, and his face was dark with hatred.

"Thought you was the wise one, eh, Mugger?" he rasped in a venom-filled voice. "Thought you could give John Law the finger?"

"But, officer, I don't—"

"Come right along, Mugger. We got special cages for the likes 'a you." He was about to snap a pair of silver cuffs to my wrists when I put a quick knee to his vitals and rabbit-punched him on the way down. Then I grabbed his revolver.

"Here!" I shouted to several passers-by. "This man is a fraud. Killed a cop to get this rig. He's a swine of the worst sort. Record as long as your arm. Blackmail, rape, arson, autotheft, kidnapping, grand larceny, wife-beating and petty pilfering. You name it, he's done it!"

I thrust the revolver at a wide-eyed, trembling woman. "Take this weapon, lady. If he makes a funny move, shoot to kill!"

She aimed the gun at the stunned policeman, who was only now getting his breath. He attempted to rise.

"OOPS!" I yelled, "he's going for a knife. Let him have it—NOW!"

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The trembling woman shut both eyes and pulled the trigger. The cop pitched forward on his face, stone dead.

"May heaven forgive you," I moaned, backing away. "You've murdered an officer of the law, a defender of public morals . . . May heaven be merciful!"

The woman flapped off. She had turned into a heavy-billed pelican. The policeman had become a fat-bellied seal with flippers, but he was still dead.

Hurrying, and somewhat depressed, I entered Dr. Mellowthin's office and told the girl at the desk it was an emergency.

"You may go right in," she told me. "The doctor will see you immediately."

In another moment I was pumping Mellowthin's hand.

"Sit down, boy," he told me. "So . . . we've got our little complications again today, have we?"

"Sure have," I said, pocketing one of his cigars. I noted that it was stale.

"Care to essay the couch?"

I slid onto the rich dark leather and closed my eyes.

"Now—tell me all about it."

"First a butterfly sang *La Boheme,* or hummed it rather. Then a Tomcat shot out of an alley with a baby in its paws. Then some mice in an apartment house yelled back at me. Then one of my oldest and dearest friends turned into a camel."

"One hump or two?" asked Mellowthin.

"Two," I said. "Large and scruffy and all worn at the tops."

"Anything else?"

"Then a big, pseudo-English cop stopped me. His dialogue was fantastic. Called me Mugger. Said I was fit for a cage. Started to put cuffs on me. I kneed him in the kishkas and gave his gun to a nice trembly lady who shot him. Then she turned into a pelican and flapped off, and he turned into a seal with flippers. Then I came here."

I opened my eyes and sat up.

I stared at Dr. Mellowthin.

"What's the matter?" he asked, somewhat uneasily.

"Well . . ." I said, "to begin with you have large brown, sad-looking, liquidy eyes."

"And?"

"And I bet your nose is cold!" I grinned.

"Anything else?"

"Not really."

"What about my overall appearance?"

"Well, of course you're covered with long black shaggy hair, even down to the tips of your big floppy ears."

A moment of strained silence.

"Can you do tricks?" I asked.

"A few," Mellowthin replied uncomfortably.

"Roll over!" I commanded.

He did.

"Play dead!"

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His liquidy eyes rolled up white and his long pink tongue lolled loosely from his jaws.

"Good doggie," I said. "Nice doggie."

"Woof," barked Dr. Mellowthin softly, wagging his tail.

Putting on my hat I tossed him a bone I'd saved from the garden and left his office.

There was absolutely no getting around it.

This was simply one of those days.

In this issue . . .

. . . Three new planets swim into our ken, in the persons of Terry Carr, whose first professionally published story is a tart and witty account of a new science versus an old religion, and a reminder that a Certain Personage has perhaps not been called The Lier From The Beginning for nothing; Otis Kidwell Burger, relating the history of a love so strong that, although unconsumated in the flesh, it bore strange and wondrous issue; and William Bankier of Canada, describing what happened to an old man in an old house when time began to run out. Old Masters James Blish, Gordon Dickson, and Ron Goulart are back with goodies in their hampers; and New Master Vance Aandahl returns with a vivid portrait of a world where the wind still blows sweetly on the heath and the rivers run unvexed to the sea once more and man alone is withered and wracked. The unfailing Dr. Asimov is his usual sapient self. The urbane Mr. Bester bows in, as Guest Columnist For Books, the no-less-polished Mr. Leiber. And the muster roll for May is wound up with the names of Joseph Nesvadba, William F. Nolan, Eric Frazee, and some hack whose name we can't lay our hands on just at this moment.

Coming next . . .

. . . are stories by Kate Wilhelm (space travel and conflicts of supreme loyalties), Will Stanton (space travel in a lighter vein), John Brunner (today's experimental work on sleep and dreams carried into early tomorrow morning), Gary Jennings (Who—in present-day Virginia—remembered the ancient warning of Laocoön?), Kris Neville (when the universe got all shook up and only the Smight family . . .), Zenna Henderson, G. C. Edmondson, and other experts.

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That man who thinks he is Napoleon—is it possible that at some time the gap between his mind and the real Napoleon's was briefly bridged, If so, might it be possible somehow to bridge that gap again . . .?

NAPOLEON'S SKULLCAP

by Gordon R. Dickson

CARL LEHMAN SAT GAZING AT the device on the white tablecloth between himself and Sean.

It was a simple band of copper, soldered to form a ring, with two more arching bands soldered to its upper edge at the four points of the compass to form a domed cross. There was clearance between the two arching bands at the point where they crossed, one above the other; and here they had been cut and fitted with small vanes, of the same width as the bands themselves, that rotated around a wire axis and wavered and turned with the lightest touch or breath. It was a tinsel device, a toy, the sort of thing anyone could throw together in his basement workshop in fifteen minutes. Carl touched one of the vanes, with a thick-boned forefinger, and it trembled, turning away from the touch, above the white tablecloth in the brilliant sunlight from the window. He felt a small shiver inside.

"What is it?" asked Carl gruffly, for he did not like puzzles.

"It's a lever," said Sean Tyrone.

Carl frowned, his thick-boned, almost brutal-looking face bent above the device. He was refusing to play straight man, continuing to try to puzzle the thing out by what he could see of it. Sean smiled a little, looking away from their restaurant table, here in the quiet, expensive upstairs dining room of the Club Chateau, and out through the window down the long slope of the hill to the Ford Dam and the ice-locked Mississippi. And Carl noted the glance.

It was the twentieth of February, in the paralyzing depths of the Minnesota winter. The sidewalks, yards, the streets and even the steep river-banks were sheeted with an iron coat of frozen snow. The sun above blared out of a

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cloudless sky, filling the world with blinding brilliance, but no heat. Piled up against the dam and stretching back along both banks, the ice lay slagged and tumbled like broken glass; and in the narrow center channel where the current of the river kept it open, the water rolled, secret and black as fresh-poured asphalt in contrast with the whiteness of the ice.

—It was, thought Carl, with that one part of his brain not busy with the device, a strange, bright, sterile, steam-heated time of year, in which life seemed to beat all the more fiercely for being confined to indoors. Everyone appeared furiously stimulated by the shocks that came with each step into the killing cold without, and later reentry into the heat within. Even with thermostats set high, the walls were cool to the touch, and windows cooler yet. Seated where he was, Carl could feel the cold breath of the season through the window upon his left arm. Sean turned his green eyes, his dark, thin face, back to Carl.

"Give up?" he said.

Carl scowled. He was a short, thick, broad man in his late twenties; and ancestors of his who had looked the same as he had been brought by the legions in chains to Rome to be pitted against wild beasts in the Coliseum. He did not look like a thinking man but he knew himself to be one.

"You said, a lever?"

"That's right," said Sean. "A psychic lever. You remember what the man said—'Give me a lever large enough—'"

"I know," said Carl. "It's the word 'psychic' I want to hear explained. Is this one of your wild hares?"

"I suppose you'd call it that," said Sean, grinning.

"Why can't you stick to the law?"

"Because there's more to the world than courts. I've told you that before."

Carl touched one of the little vanes again with his forefinger.

"What does it do?" he asked.

"That's what I'd like to show you," said Sean. "Tell me, do you have anything like a Napoleon up at that summer resort of yours?"

Carl frowned.

"Rest home," he said.

"Rest home, then," said Sean. "I never can remember the proper euphemism. Anyway, the place where you keep your psychotics. I want one that thinks he's Napoleon, or Ghengis Khan, or Nero. Do you have one like that, Doctor?"

"And don't call me 'doctor.'"

"Why not? Has your doctorate been withdrawn for malpractice?"

"It's not in the field of medicine. We don't call clinical psychologists doctors."

"You mean *you* don't, Carl."

"All right, then. *I* don't." Carl did not raise his voice. He laced

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his stubby fingers on the tablecloth in front of him by his martini glass and sat immovable.

"But about the Napoleon—" said Sean.

"I think you know we have a guest at the home who imagines himself Napoleon," said Carl. "I mentioned him to you last fall; and you know I know you don't forget anything. What would you want with him?"

"I want to try out the psychic lever on him," said Sean. "There's a man in the east who has a theory about his particular kind of delusion. He suggests that maybe your psychotic got that way because at one time, for one moment, he had a sudden flash of actual identification with the real Napoleon—"

"Over a hundred and fifty years?"

"How do we know it can't happen?" said Sean. "And that moment of contact with a far superior mind knocked him silly, leaving him only with the *idee fixe* that he *is* Bonaparte."

"And what," asked Carl, "is your psychic lever supposed to do? And what makes you think it'll do it?"

"Bridge the gap between the two minds again," answered Sean. "And it'll do it, because it's worked for me."

Carl frowned.

"Oh—I don't mean the way it will for him," said Sean, cheerfully. "I've spent the past four months experimenting with machines like this. Putting them on my head and trying them out as memory aids. I'd put one on and try to remember some place I knew as a child—or some person. This one helps. It actually helps." He pushed it a little toward Carl with one finger. "Try it, if you want."

Carl kept his fingers locked together.

"And you want to try it on this disturbed man up at the Home," he said. "What for?"

"Why, if it works," said Sean, leaning forward, "he'll be in contact with Napoleon's mind again. He'll *be* Napoleon." His eyes glowed like green fire under their black brows. "It'll be like talking to Bonaparte himself. Don't look like that, Carl! If I could put the lever on myself and do it myself, I'd do it myself. But I'm not capable of bridging the gap. Only someone who could do it once before might be helped to do it again." He paused, staring at the other man. "How about it? What do you say?"

"I say," said Carl, unlacing his fingers and taking a deliberate drink from his martini glass, "you wasted the money to take me to lunch here. I won't let you in, of course."

"You don't believe it," said Sean. He pronounced the words like a statement, but it was a question.

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"I do not."

"You don't think it will work."

"I know it won't," said Carl, calmly. "I've known you fourteen years, Sean. It's always been one thing or another—one wild idea taking over from the one before. This is that psi business you were so hot about last summer, and you've been so quiet about lately, isn't it? This last's the underground stage, the most dangerous of the lot. I recognize it all right; and I've been expecting you to come up with something like this."

"But you're sure nothing will happen," persisted Sean. "All right, what's the harm in trying it on this man?"

"You don't understand professional ethics," said Carl. "And you ought to, being a lawyer. It's not just that I'm bound to refrain from doing harm to my patients —"

"Oh, *now* they're patients."

"—I'm bound to do only that to and for them I'm convinced will do them good. This experiment of yours not only won't do George Larsen any good, it might disturb him further and do him some positive harm."

"George Larsen?" Sean pounced on the words. "That's his name?"

"So take your own crazy chances—but don't involve me," wound up Carl. "Or anyone I'm responsible for."

"Look," said Sean, urgently, "what's he like?"

"Like? Who?" Carl finished off his martini, and Sean, without turning his head, held up two fingers and wiggled them. The waiter, a dry, thin old man, was immediately at the side of the table.

"Two more martinis?"

"Yes—you know who I mean, Carl," said Sean, answering the waiter and talking on to Carl all at once, his lean, tall body hunched tensely forward over the edge of the table. The waiter went silently off. " 'George Larsen' you called him. What's he like?"

"That second martini's the limit. No more now," said Carl. "What do you want to know for?"

"What harm would it do—?"

"All right." Carl shrugged. "He's not too old—early thirties. Rather small. Used to be a druggist."

"But, I mean, what's he like?"

"How do I know what he's *like?*" asked Carl, angrily. "If I knew what he was like, maybe I could help him. That's a word that doesn't mean anything. He's a man who couldn't stand being what he actually was, so he's retreated to being somebody else who doesn't have his problems."

"He hasn't been committed?" asked Sean.

"No, no. None of them we have, are. They come voluntarily. It's a private institution, the Rest Home. He wouldn't even be there, if he didn't have an older brother

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in the paper-box manufacturing business that could afford it."

Sean shook his head and glanced again for a moment, down out the window at the ice of the river, with its great moving volume of dark waters hidden from his sight. When he looked back, he said, "I'd like to meet him."

The waiter came back with their fresh drinks. After he had set them down and gone, Carl answered.

"I'm sorry. No. Not that either."

"Well—let's order," said Sean, turning and picking up the oversize gold-printed menu.

They ordered, and later on their lunches came. But as they ate, Sean returned to the subject and hammered away at it.

"—Just let me look at him," he said. "I just want to meet him, that's all."

Until finally, worn out, "All right!" Carl said, over the coffee. "You promise me, it's just to look? No monkey business?"

"None. Nothing," said Sean, fervently. Carl drank his hot coffee without looking, burnt his tongue and swore.

"I ought to know better, damn it. Always, you talk me into these things. But I warn you—you pull something—"

"You can trust me," said Sean. But his eyes glittered in his thin, dark face, Carl thought, like sunlight reflected from the ice on the river.

It was two days later that Carl took Sean up to see George Larsen. Carl led Sean down a wide pleasant corridor on the second story of the rest home, which was one of the old river-road mansions rebuilt and redecorated, and into a large room which combined the elements of bedroom and living room.

The room was wide enough to dwarf the bed, which was hospital style but covered with a cheerfully ruffled yellow bedspread. None of the rest of the room's furnishings hinted at anything else than a room in an ordinary home. The four wide windows in the outer wall opposite the entrance gave a view of a clear and empty sky, turning now to the dark blue of evening, for it was after four and the early winter day was withdrawing its sunlight. Inside the room, a ceiling light behind a glass shade was alight. It, and a tall desk lamp, shed a warm yellow illumination over the red-carpeted floor, a couple of easy chairs, and another, straight, chair at a writing desk by the windows. Outside the windows, a sentinel row of icicles hung long and heavy from the wide eaves, as if they had been there undisturbed for many years.

A short man with a rather large head, greying hair, and a prematurely wrinkled face, had been writing at the desk as they came in. But he put down his pen, got

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up and came toward them politely.

"George," said Carl, "this is an old friend of mine—Sean Tyrone. He wanted to meet you. Sean, this is George Larsen."

"A pleasure to meet you." George Larsen nodded his big head, but made no move to take the hand Sean held out to him. "Sit down, Tyrone. You, too, Lehman."

The simple pomposity of the disturbed man touched Carl. It was his one failing in his work, he considered, that he felt too deeply for those he worked with. He glanced sharply at Sean, for this was the sort of weakness Sean was quick to spot and quicker yet to gibe at. But Sean was anything but laughing. He had taken one of the easy chairs, as George Larsen had taken the other, and was losing no time about charming the little man. A stream of cheerful chatter was already bubbling out of him. Not only that, but Larsen was thawing under it. Carl had a sudden twinge of emotion, that he recognized with a start of surprise as something close to jealousy.

He remembered how he had worked to reach through to the disturbed Larsen the first few weeks. The man had been antagonistic, withdrawn, huddling over his delusion like a child with a cherished plaything. The interviews Carl had had with him had been filled with awkward, suspicious silences. And now Sean, capitalizing on the breach Carl had already made in Larsen's defenses, was pouring himself into Larsen's confidence like a thoughtless river through a broken dam. Blast him, thought Carl, looking at Sean's dark Gaelic face, animated now by the talk, and he's so damn capable. If he'd only put his talent to real ends, instead of into these wild fantasies . . .

His anger shook Carl to the point where he got up to hide it, and stepped across to the windows, leaving the other two talking. Behind him, he could hear Sean leading Larsen on to speak as Napoleon. Carl looked down at the broad, snow-clad lawn below, spread out under the towering pines of the grounds. It would be spring in a few weeks, he thought, and then suddenly everything would be breaking out at once; earth-patches showing raw through the melting snow, water running loudly in the gutters, under a fresh, clean sky flecked with puffy clouds—and at night a damp, wet wind from the south, stirring the soul of a man even as it stirred the buried seeds in the ground with the call of new life.

With spring, and its call to the blood, Sean might drop this crazy interest of his. He ought to be married, thought Carl, thinking of his own wife and two children, but he—

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—an abrupt cessation of voices behind him, a sudden silence, rang abruptly and frighteningly on Carl's ears. He spun around.

Sean was standing, tall over Larsen. And Larsen himself, still seated, was lifting uncertain hands to his oversize skull on which gleamed, in the deceptively gentle glow of the yellow room-light, the 'psychic lever' Sean had shown Carl at the lunch table, two days before.

Carl moved without thinking. He did not stop to ask himself from what pocket Sean had produced the thing, out of his slacks or the thick tweed sports jacket he was wearing. Half-blind with rage, he took three swift strides across the carpet, and snatched the device from Larsen's head, just as the little man's fingers were closing upon it.

Larsen made an odd noise somewhere between a grunt and a cry, and staggered to his feet. His hands dropped down and Carl had one quick glimpse of his blank and thunder-smitten eyes, and of a thin line of dark red beads springing suddenly up on one forefinger that had been hooked into the device when Carl had torn it away. Then Carl had swung about and was herding Sean out of the room with the whole wide, heavy-boned weight of his body.

"We'll see you later, George," said Carl, with trained calmness; and then he and Sean were out through the door, and Carl swung it shut behind him.

Carl flapped his hand back down the way they had come, and they went off side by side, not talking, back along the corridor and down the stairs to the entrance hall, where Sean's coat hung with others on a long rack shoved back against the white-painted wall of the entrance alcove.

Sean put on his storm coat and hat without saying anything; but when he turned about, there was a strange dark gleam of triumph in his eyes, and at the sight of it Carl felt the anger leak out of him in helplessness. He shoved the device, bent now, into Sean's hands, and jerked his hand at the door.

"Go on," he said, putting his hands in his pockets and hunching his shoulders as if against the cold.

Sean watched a second, smiling, then turned about and opened the heavy front door onto the dying day and the throat-crisping chill. He stepped out, putting the psychic lever into his pocket, and pulled the door shut, heavily, behind him.

For the week following (and this Carl found out later) Sean went on a bat. He had no cases coming up in court in that time, and for all the other things that he needed to do, he set aside the morning of the day after he had

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met Larsen and called up everyone who needed to be called; and charmed them into putting their business off for the present. Then, for the rest of the week he ran—not doing any one thing to excess, never completely drunk, never completely sober, never completely mad, never quite sane, but adding so many things together that they totalled to excess. He would come rolling into a bar, lean, well-pressed and shaven, his eyes glinting, and half-insult, half-joke the drinkers about him into laughter. Then, when they were warming to the party, he would finish his drink and break away—alone, always alone. And out the door into the gripping cold, into his green-and-white Jaguar, with the top buttoned tight against the wind, and with the motor snarling fling himself over the looping highways to the next restaurant, bar, or small-town beer joint, where the whole performance would be repeated again. He ranged east into Wisconsin, glanced off Milwaukee, cut back north through Superior and Duluth, up the North Shore of Lake Superior into Canada, back down across through International Falls to the hard-drinking mining towns of the Mesabi Range, west to Fargo, back south to Brainerd and the Gull Lake resort area, and then, as if by instinct in one drumming night run, home, with the Jaguar wide open most of the way and screaming on the banked curves in the moonlight.

He fell into bed and slept for twelve hours.

When he woke, he felt drained and exhausted, but calm. Cheerfully, he got up and went back to the usual routine of his life. For a number of weeks following he was a perfectly normal, conscientious bachelor lawyer. He got rid of one girl friend and acquired another, and he traded the Jag in on a Mercedes-Benz.

Meanwhile, with the suddenness of the north, winter broke suddenly into spring. The temperatures jumped. The ice vanished from streets and river and the sky went high and blue with only a few egg-white fluffs of clouds riding in it under the newly hot sun. Buds swelled on the pussy-willows and the elm trees, and, suddenly, one lunch time, Sean stepped into a phone booth in a bar and called up Carl at the Home. At the other end, Carl picked up the phone on his desk and started at the unexpected sound of Sean's voice coming out of the receiver.

"Hi there, old buddy," it said. "Remember me? How about lunch?"

"Damn you," said Carl, deliberately. He took the phone away from his ear to put it back in its cradle, hesitated, and placed it back against his ear once more. At the

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other end, he heard Sean laugh.

"—carrying a grudge."

"I'm not carrying a grudge," said Carl. But in the same moment he felt it again—his own weakness where the other man was concerned, his own inability to resent Sean's outrageousness. It's because I can't help admiring him, he said to himself—in spite of it. He became conscious Sean was still talking. To continue to make a fuss about something that happened that long ago would be ridiculous.

"—how about it, then?" Sean was saying, cheerfully.

"You pay for the lunch!" growled Carl.

"My pleasure," said Sean, and hung up.

They got together for lunch at a new place Sean had discovered. The steaks were excellent; and Sean was at his most entertaining. It was not until Sean had asked the question and Carl had already begun to answer it that he recognized that the whole lunch invitation had been leading up to this very moment.

"He's—what do you want to know for?" snapped Carl.

"Why, I'm interested!" said Sean, raising his eyebrows in surprise. "Any reason why I shouldn't be?"

"I suppose not," muttered Carl. "Well," he answered grudgingly, "As a matter of fact, he's better. We're discharging him."

"Better?" Sean had leaned forward. His green eyes were alight.

"As a matter of fact, he is. I want some more coffee," said Carl, pretending to look around for the waitress and stretching out his little revenge of withholding information Sean wanted. Instantly he recognized what he was doing and was ashamed of it. He turned back and said hastily, generously, "No, no—he really is very much better. He's lost his delusion—"

"You mean that he was Napoleon?"

"Of course that's what I mean. He seemed rather confused for a while after—after that damfool trick of yours," Carl remembered to growl. "But bit by bit he seemed to come to a better recognition of his surroundings. He was almost eager to be set straight on things. Except—" Carl frowned—"that he's no longer interested in pharmacy. Doesn't want to discuss it, and in fact he doesn't even seem to remember much about it. But—"

"I want to see him," said Sean.

"Oh no you don't!" Carl jerked upright in his chair and glared across the table.

"Be reasonable." Sean laid one hand palm-up on the white tablecloth. "What kind of harm can I do him? Besides, from what you said, maybe what I did before was part of what helped him back to himself. I didn't do him anything but good last time, did I?"

"I'm not so sure about that—"

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"Come on, Carl! Just to say a few words to him. I won't bring any psychic levers. You can search me beforehand."

Carl shook his head, angrily gulped the coffee that remained in his cup, and all the time knew he was fighting a losing battle. By the time lunch was over, it had been arranged for him to take Sean up to see George Larsen the next day at noon.

George, when Carl led Sean into his room at the home, was very little different in appearance from the man Carl had introduced Sean to in February. Against his own will, Carl found himself studying the changes in hopes of seeing something new, now that the catalytic person of Sean was once more in the room with the man. But there was little to see that he had not already noted.

Primarily, Larsen was more natural now, in appearance. Less stagy. He no longer posed with hand inside his coat or shirt, seemed in other ways to be more sure of himself. Certainly he was more active. He was almost continually in movement, pacing the room, darting quick glances out of his black eyes—unusually keen glances, too, as Carl had discovmany times—at his visitor. He said he remembered Sean, shook hands politely, and thanked him a little dryly for whatever share he had had in a patient's recovery.

"—Though I don't remember much about it," said Larsen. "That device you put on my head—like a crown, was it not?"

"More like a coronet," said Sean smiling—and for a second, out of his long knowledge of Sean, Carl received the sudden feeling that the answer held more to it than appeared on the surface.

"No—I remember," said Larsen. "The top was closed in—like a crown. I remember well. Several times, for my amusement, I've tried to reconstruct the shape of it; but my memory fails me. It would be necessary to see it again. Perhaps, if you described it—?"

Carl opened his mouth. But Sean spoke smoothly.

"Let's see . . . No, I'm afraid I can't remember exactly, myself," he said, and shook his head regretfully. "I tossed it out after that. It was just a toy, you know."

"Oh, but of course! A toy," said Larsen.

"Let's see . . ." Sean frowned. "I guess I've got an old diagram lying around someplace. If I run across it, I could mail it to you. What's your address, here?"

"No, not here," said Larsen, quickly. "I'll be leaving shortly. And then—a small room, someplace. Probably in the University district. A brother of mine has arranged permission for me to use the University library. I'll send you the address, as soon as I'm moved in."

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He and Sean looked at each other, and once again Carl had the feeling that more had been meant than was said. This time, some sort of agreement had been reached, he thought. Carl felt the hairs on the back of his neck stir uncomfortably.

"Well, we just dropped by—" he said abruptly; and the moment the words were out of his mouth, he realized how they must sound; and he expected them both to turn on him in surprise at his attempt to end a conversation that had hardly begun. But, to his own surprise and some alarm, neither of them seemed put out at all. It was as if they had said what they wanted to say and were ready enough to part.

"So—that's that," the same jealous feeling impelled Carl to say as they walked away from Larsen's room together, he and Sean.

Sean looked at him and smiled. As he and Carl separated at the front door of the Home, he spoke about something else.

"How about going fishing next month on the weekend the season opens?" he said. "We could sit around in the boat and do a bit of talking. Cabbages and kings—new gods for old. That sort of thing."

"I'm sorry," said Carl, brusquely. "I've got too much to do these days."

Afterwards, he wondered at himself. He had always liked fishing, and he was not that busy. But something inside him seemed to have taken a moral stand against Sean. Prosaically and doggedly, the way he did such things, he put the matter out of his mind and went back to his work.

Meanwhile, George Larsen had left the Home. He was living in a single room in a college rooming house. His paper-box manufacturing brother was not pleased at having to support a man who—if he had not, for some foolish reason he would not explain, refused to go back to the work he had done for years—could otherwise have been supporting himself quite well as a pharmacist. George, Carl learned from the brother, who called him up once or twice for advice on handling the ex-patient, spent most of his time reading up on religions. Particularly Buddhism.

"—He's become a sort of religious nut," the brother complained. Carl made soothing remarks.

"Possibly it's only transitory," Carl said.

"Well, he better transitory out of it in a damn hurry, is all I've got to say!"

Around the beginning of April, George himself began calling Carl. George was trying to locate Sean, and he had been having difficulty. It seemed Sean was never at home or in his office; and Sean had never sent George the promised dia-

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gram for the psychic lever. When Carl answered that he had as little chance of locating Sean for George as any one of the city's other half-million citizens, George's manner showed a change it had never exhibited at the Home. His voice became cold and cutting with exasperation, and he came perilously close to ordering Carl to produce Sean forthwith. Then he seemed to recollect himself, apologized, and hung up.

On impulse, Carl called up Sean's office, and left a message that he'd like to go fishing on the season opener, after all.

He hardly expected Sean to fulfill his original invitation, but two weeks later, he found himself with his friend on one of the upstate lakes, pipe between his teeth and his minnow-baited hook twelve feet down under the boat, waiting for hungry walleye pike.

"George Larsen called me a couple of times," he told Sean, when the conversation gave him a chance to slip the information in. "Wants to get hold of you."

Sean's fingers, busy packing a pipe of his own, stilled suddenly.

"Oh, yes," he said. And his fingers went back to work. "I did forget to send him that diagram, didn't I?" He packed the pipe tightly, put his pouch away. "Got a match?"

Watching him, Carl handed over a wooden match. Sean lit up. He did not seem inclined to talk about George. But, after a few minutes, he pulled up his line to check if the minnow had been eaten off it by some soft-mouthed fish, and dropped it overboard again.

"You know . . ." he began; and stopped.

"What?" asked Carl. —And then, suddenly, he had eyes only for the float attached to his line, which had just twitched half-under the surface.

"I wonder how far a man is supposed to go . . . ?" he heard Sean say.

Carl looked up sharply from his float, expecting to find the mocking light of some new joke in Sean's eyes. To his surprise, Sean's face was cold serious, and heavy with a weariness that unexpectedly made him look older, as some heavy burden might prematurely age a man.

"'How far—?' How far with what?" asked Carl, staring.

"How far, I mean, with fiddling with the gears of life," said Sean with a seriousness that was not at all like him. Carl gave him a long, hard look.

"I don't understand you, Sean," he said.

"I mean—how far should anyone go? Or let another man go? Suppose," said Sean, "you knew you could give me the means to change me into a devil—the real Devil, I mean, Satan, himself. Would you do it?"

Carl grunted sourly.

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"You're bad enough the way you are," he said.

Sean laughed suddenly—and as suddenly was sober again.

"Maybe you're right," he said. "No, I don't suppose you, being the sort you are, would have any trouble making a decision like that. But there's something in me that can't help it. I've always had to risk things . . . two feet more beyond the fence . . . ten miles more over the speed limit And now—"

"Whoops—hey! I've got one!" shouted Carl, suddenly. His float had shot under, the tip of his rod was arced toward the water and the razor edge of his line was cutting the water to froth as the fish below rushed and spun. His reel whined as line went out. "That's no walleye—that's a northern—" The line sang off his reel and the fish broke water, tail-walking, thirty feet from the boat. "Look at him! Look at the size of him!"

"Fifteen pounds, anyway!" Sean was leaning over the side of the boat, himself, frantically reeling in his own line, his eyes shining. "Don't lose him. Hang on! Hang on if he kills you!"

Carl hung on. Twelve minutes later the big northern pike was gaffed and brought inboard where he lay gasping until Sean killed him with a single blow from the metal handle of the gaff.

"—Now," said Carl, taking off his khaki cap and wiping the sweat from above his eyes. "Now, what was that you were saying?"

"Nothing," said Sean. He laughed without warning. "Nothing. I guess I was just asking a question; and first thing I knew I'd answered myself." He leaned back to start the motor on the boat. "Let's head in. We aren't going to top that northern of yours the rest of this afternoon—and I want a drink."

The next day they returned to the city. Sean was reckless as ever—but Carl sensed something different about his recklessness this time. As if Sean was not so much defying accident and death in his usual manner, as courting it under the guise of playing with it. The notion struck Carl so strongly that a couple of days after he got back he phoned Sean, and was told by Sean's secretary that Sean was busy with personal business and could not be reached.

Still disturbed, Carl tried to get in touch with George Larsen; but Larsen's landlady informed him that the former pharmacist spent his days at the university library, and it was not likely that he would be home until five that evening.

Carl hung up and tried to put the matter out of his mind the rest of that day. But around four in the afternoon, Sean called.

"Hi!" said Sean's voice, cheerfully enough over the phone. "Just about through for the day?"

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"Pretty close. Why?" asked Carl.

"Like you to take a short drive with me."

"Where to?"

"No questions, huh?" said Sean. "I'll explain it afterward—if you still want an explanation. I'll swing around and pick you up in my car in about fifteen minutes."

"Well—" Carl looked at his desk, which still had work upon it; then made a quick decision based on the way he had been feeling all day. "All right. I'll be outside."

He was waiting in the soft spring shadows as the Mercedes-Benz pulled into the curb a handful of minutes later. He climbed in beside Sean, not without banging his knee on the dashboard. He swore.

"Why don't you get a decent car?" he growled. Sean laughed.

"Take some weight off," he said. He pulled the car away from the curb.

"I suppose I'm not supposed to ask any questions, yet?" said Carl. "I hope this doesn't mean I eat dinner at ten o'clock tonight."

"You'll eat on time," said Sean. "As for questions—well, wait and see. Oh, by the way—" His voice became casual. "I've been doing a little legal work for myself for a change. Making out a will. I didn't realize how much property I'd accumulated. Got you down for chief legatee and trustee of the balance."

"I don't need your blasted money," said Carl, stiffly.

"Then you can put it into good works. I've stipulated one in my will—the kind of odd research I've always done."

"I wouldn't make a fool of myself doing that sort—"

"You don't have to. Just back anybody else who will." Sean broke off suddenly. "Ah, this looks like the neighborhood. It must be right around here."

"What?" said Carl, and then realized that they had driven down into the University district. Apartments, and old houses divided up to hold roomers, were thick about them. "You aren't hunting George Larsen, are you?"

"That's right," said Sean, absently, peering out the car window. "—There's the address." He pulled the Mercedes to a stop before a tall, brown, shingle-sided dwelling about fifty years old. "Come on."

He was out of the car himself, and halfway up the walk to the front steps of the building before Carl could emerge from his surprise and follow. They came up to the front door together. Sean opened it and led the way into a narrow hall, from which a varnished wooden stairway with a heavy polished balustrade rose to a bay window of stained glass, changed direction there sharply for another flight, and disappeared out of sight overhead.

Sean knocked at a brown door close at hand in the hallway. It

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opened and a pleasant-looking, aproned woman in her fifties looked out at them.

"Yes? I'm the landlady."

"George Larsen's room?" Sean said, smiling. "I'm Mr. Sean Tyrone. He may have—"

"Oh yes, Mr. Tyrone!" She smiled back. "He said, if ever you came, to go right up. Third floor, room nine. Just go right in, the door isn't locked."

"Thanks," said Sean, and led the way up the steep stairs where the air smelled faintly of forgotten meals. Carl followed.

Four flights, and two floors, up, they came on the door—like all the other sad brown doors in this place, but with the metal numeral 9 affixed to it. Sean turned the knob and they went in.

The room had a military cleanness and simplicity. A bed, a nightstand, a chest of drawers—a tall bookcase jammed with books, a flag of France on the wall, and a U.S. war surplus Marine saber in its faded canvas-and-metal sheath, hung on nails on the wall. Suddenly remembering what George Larsen's brother had said over the phone, Carl went to the bookcase. The brother had been quite right. There were no books in the bookcase that did not deal with the great religions in one way or another. And most were concerned with Buddhism, and the life of Buddha.

Everything in the room was strictly, almost rigidly, in place.

"No point in staying, come to think of it," said Sean. "I only dropped by to leave him something, anyway."

"Well, as long as we're here, I'd like to see the man—"

"No. No, I've got to get going. Come on, Carl—I'll explain as we go." Sean took two rapid steps to the door and held it open. Carl hesitated, sadly puzzled, but with the presentiment that had been with him all day heavy upon him. He turned to leave the room—but, as he crossed it, he noticed a small package, about the size of a shoe box, sitting on the desk. It had not been there before.

"Is that—" he began, pointing at it. But Sean interrupted him hastily, pulling him out and closing the door behind him.

"Yes. Never mind it now. It's just—" Sean, at the landing of the stairs leading down, checked so sharply that Carl ran into him from behind.

"What is it?" Carl's voice rang loud in the still hall.

"Shh—" Sean held up one hand for silence. Carl listened. In the absence of the sounds they had been making, he could hear the front door two flights below close sharply. Another door opened.

"—Oh, Mr. Larsen— That Mr. Tyrone you told me about's upstairs. He and another man—" It was the landlady's voice.

"Thank you." It was Larsen.

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"Shh—this way!" Carl felt Sean's fingers digging into his shoulder with unnatural force, turning him. "Up the stairs, around the corner. Shh . . ."

Numbly, wondering, Carl obeyed. He felt caught, suddenly, as if in a dream, where everything was a little too absurd to be real. They went together, softly and silently halfway up the stairs to the floor above—around the angle where one flight changed to the next. Standing there, hidden, so close together they could hear each other breathing, their ears registered the sound of light feet briskly mounting the bare steps of the stairway. The sound came up to the landing below them, stopped, and there was a further sound of a doorknob being turned.

The door below them was flung open. A noise, too choked-off to be a cry, too emotion-laden to be merely an exclamation, reached their ears. There was the sound of two more rapid steps and then the noise of ripped paper and cardboard.

"Now!" hissed Sean. He went down the steps quietly but two at a time, with great speed. Carl, taken by surprise, stared after him for a second, and then leaped to follow. He caught up with Sean just before Sean reached the still-open doorway of the room. For the first time, Carl understood.

"Sean!" he shouted, grabbing one well-tailored arm. "Don't be a damn fool! Don't risk—"

Sean spun about suddenly in mid-stride; and his arm shot out in a shove with an astonishing strength behind it. Caught off balance, Carl was flung back, tripped and fell. Sprawling ingloriously, for the first time it came home to him, in great bitterness, what he himself truly was, and always had been, and never admitted to himself. The cautiousness in him, the cowardice that had kept him from taking the sort of chances Sean had always taken. In that one split second, he drained the bitter cup of self-knowledge to the dregs. And saw Sean, head up, turn from him and pass into the room.

For the space of one heartbeat, then, there was silence; and then from the room there erupted a cry almost unhuman in its mixture of pain and ecstasy. A strange and mingled cry that should have been made by one voice, but sounded almost like two voices matched together. Scrambling to his feet, Carl launched himself at the open doorway.

He turned the corner into the room's interior, and checked, as if he had run up against the brink of a pit, whose further depths were too far down for the eye to plumb. Across the room, with Sean's 'psychic lever' upon his head, George Larsen lay curled on the floor. His face was wiped clean of human expression. His eyes were closed. Only, for a second—and either it was not there, or it faded

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so fast Carl could not afterwards be sure he had seen it—the shadow of another visage seemed momentarily imposed upon it. A visage whose eyes were slightly slanted, whose features were rounded, smoothed and cast into an expression of terrible serenity.

—Then, it was only the face of George Larsen, relaxed to utter emptiness. As his body, too, lay breathing but empty in foetal position upon the floor.

But it was not alone in the room, the shape that had been George Larsen. The also breathing and mindless body of Sean Tyrone rested in frozen adoration before the empty vessel of flesh that lay curled before the desk. Sean's face stared straight ahead, with a look of raptness and wonder fixed movelessly upon it. Sean's arms were half-outstretched, his palms open and up as if in a gesture of offering. And he was down upon his knees—in kneeling position.

—As fits a man who, living, has gazed upon the face of a god, alive.

EMSH-

F & SF—FOR A LIFETIME

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Readers, are the trees in your neighborhood the upright pieces of deciduous arboreal vegetation which they seem to be? That hollow oak on the blasted heath, now, for example.

NOSELRUBB, THE TREE

by Eric Frazee

SWOOPING ACROSS THE FROZEN meadow, the wind veered suddenly and curled its strength around the base of the lone silvertip spruce, whipping away the insulating blanket of snow at the base of the trunk.

With a moan he looked down at his exposed feet. They were cold. He was cold. His name was Noselrubb and he was the tree.

He shook vigorously, throwing snow from his branches. He thought of his home, Slupbh, on the planet Phid. There it was warm. There he had been happy. There he had met Lechtmi at Phid U. She took one look at him, whipped out her portable computer, ran twenty-three factors through it in a twinkling, and announced that Noselrubb loved her.

"Now wait a minute!" said Noselrubb.

They were married the next day.

Mathematically speaking, Lechtmi was a beauty. Her many angles were exquisitely joined. She was seven times as intelligent as any Phiddian male. At the U, Noselrubb and other young liberals secretly had admired the strange customs of other planets, where males were at least on an equal footing with females, and where curves, instead of angles, were a measure of feminine beauty.

After thirty lakks, however, Lechtmi's clever mathematical telepathy began to tell. Noselrubb began to think she was beautiful, and he almost forgot about strange customs in faroff places.

Then came the call from the Colonel.

"I see you majored in interplanetary scan, Noselrubb."

"Yes, sir."

The Colonel scowled. "You also wasted time with a lot of scrupp those civilian educators like to call 'rounding the man.'"

"Round—ah, yes!" said Noselrubb, spying the Colonel's aide in

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the next office. No sharp angles on her. Round and well packed, she was. A few million lakks before, a Colonel Cetwaff had lost control of himself and his whole crew on a routine flight to Crumz.

The whole ship's company came back to Phid with foreign wives, round ones. What happened to Cetwaff for leading this little spree into miscegenation was too awful to record in formal history.

The results of Cetwaffian Error still existed.

Noselrubb continued to goggle at the aide.

"Noselrubb!"

"Yes, sir."

"You've studied about Crumz, of course. It's that tiny planet the inhabitants call Earth. We can't change the names of all the planets to match the idiotic whims of the inferior life on them, but we have expanded Project Squee to give closer attention to Crumz.

"Our observers take the forms of some object on the particular planet. They make careful notes which are picked up every lakk—Are you listening to me?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Noselrubb, tearing his gaze from the aide.

"Good! You just volunteered for duty on Crumz. Report to Captain Glut at once."

Noselrubb went home instead.

"Duty on Crumz, eh?" said Lechtmi.

"You know everything before it happens."

Lechtmi glanced at her computer and tried to appear modest.

"I thought maybe you—" Noselrubb said.

"No, I can't. That is, I don't wish to get you out of the assignment. You're so immature, Nosel. I've decided that the duty will do you good."

"I'd better pack."

"I've already done that."

"You and that damned computer," Noselrubb mumbled, and went to see Captain Glut.

"What's your preference?" the Captain asked.

Noselrubb considered. A car? A boat? A bridge? How about a ski lift? Not that; his feet had a tendency to get cold. "I want to be a 50-story building in New York."

"Fine!" said the Captain.

And that was how Noselrubb came to be a tree. A tree in the middle of nowhere, half frozen, with nothing to observe but unsanitary little birds and hairy little animals. The schedule of the ration ship was erratic, moreover.

The wind died. Once more it began to snow. Noselrubb shook his branches. He groaned.

When the ration ship came in, he was not even aware of it until he felt the bump on his knowledge branch. "Empty, as usual, no doubt," the smart sergeant said, as he removed the branch.

The exposed spot felt like an aching tooth. The replacement branch was even colder, for it had

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been carried in cargo space at a hundred degrees below zero. Lousy lubphs! The least they could have done was warm the new branch, but Noselrubb was the last stop on the ship's regular run, and the whole crew was anxious to get back to Phid for dinner.

"Stand by for a direct call from Colonel Naktoe," the sergeant said.

Noselrubb shivered.

"Post 89?" the Colonel barked.

"Here, sir," said Noselrubb.

"Your reports on Crumzian wildlife are the most miserable efforts yet! What are you doing down there—sleeping?"

"No, sir."

"Two miles east of you, my bug and ant agent, Post 88, is face down in five feet of snow, but his reports make yours sound like a pile of scrupp!"

"But, sir, there's hardly anything—"

"Listen to this!" The Colonel read, *Lakk Three: Snowbird lit on branch. SB cruffed on branch.* "Let's go back to last summer." *Crumzian pet called dog xedded on trunk.*

There was an ominous silence.

"Another thing, Noselrubb. We spent a lot of time and money teaching you how to be a tree, how to stand, how to sway in the wind—the whole routine. And still I saw you myself, in clear daylight, shaking snow from your branches!"

"Colonel, have you ever tried holding all your arms out for days and days, with weight growing and growing on them, with your feet getting cold and colder, with —"

"Your feet got cold!" The Colonel almost choked. "Noselrubb, straighten up and do your job, or it's the Scrambler for you!" He clicked out.

The Scrambler was a mysterious female. It was reliably reported that she began merely by looking at transgressors—they were always males, of course—until they started to believe that they were strong, intelligent, superior creatures. Step by step she led them on until they thought they were masters of creation. What happened then no one really knew, but something in the terrible let-down reduced the Scrambler's victims to silly, giggling characters who were fit only to work for the health department after the ordeal.

You saw them on the plazas, simpering and scratching as they removed warts from the ninth toes of bureaucrats.

Not the Scrambler, Noselrubb thought. He had hoped that his silly reports would result in getting him transferred, maybe to Miami, where his friend Kapott was a surfboard.

Boy, the stories he had heard about Crumzian females crawling all over Kapott!

The Colonel hadn't gone for

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the transfer idea. Noselrubb didn't want to be Scrambled. He guessed he had better fly right for a while.

And he tried. He improved his reports. He quit shaking his branches—in daytime. He worked hard. Did the Colonel give him a kind word? Heck, no.

One fairly warm day Noselrubb got his first look at Crumzians. There were two of them, underdeveloped creatures with only four limbs. Two of the limbs hung loosely. The other two sprang from their central control section and extended to the snow, and were used to propel the entire structure, primitive as it was.

Cackling and jabbering, the Crumzians walked up to Noselrubb and looked him over. Before he knew it they were hacking away at him with a crude instrument.

With the first blow, the words of his basic training instructor came back: "I think that I shall never see . . ." The instructor had quoted with fine dramatic power, but he had added at the end, "Don't be misled by such slush. They say it, but they have a nasty habit of using trees as a source of heat in their primitive shelters.

"It will likely never happen to you, but if you are approached by tree-hunting Crumzians, simply avoid contact with them, without arousing their suspicions, of course. Clear enough?"

On Phid that was good thinking. On Crumz it lacked something.

Maybe his size would discourage them, Noselrubb hoped.

Splunk! Chunk! They meant business.

In desperation Noselrubb shook his branches. Snow plumed down in a fine shower. The Crumzians looked up, amazed. "Just the vibration of the axe," one said.

Splat! Splunk!

Noselrubb began to sweat. It was a downpour. The Crumzians lurched out of his perspiration zone. They stared with awe at the lone tree standing in a great ring of slush. They left their tool and hurried away, looking back over their shoulders.

Knowing that the Colonel no doubt had monitored the whole performance, Noselrubb no longer gave a damn. That night he set out to visit the bug and ant agent. He uprooted himself and walked the two miles through the snow, and the tracks he left behind him were fantastic to behold.

Under five feet of snow he found Post 88, a rotten log. "Wake up, you Phiddian spy!"

The log didn't budge.

"Quit playing games. I know you." Noselrubb gave the log a whale of a kick with his roots.

With a grunt the agent rolled over. "What the gretch do you mean, breaking security?"

"I've got troubles."

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The log rolled back in place. "You'd better get back to your post on the double."

"I couldn't make it. I'm bushed. Don't turn your back on me, please! I've got to talk to—"

"Shut up! My ants will get suspicious."

"Now wouldn't that be just too —" That was all Noselrubb had a chance to say. The invisible ship nosed against him. A ray hoisted him. He was materialized in his normal form inside. Captain Glut was in command. He said nothing as the ship retraced Noselrubb's steps, obliterating them with manufactured snow.

At the center of the meadow rays melted the ring of ice, and then new snow was deposited over the bare spot and a real tree replaced Noselrubb.

"Make course for Phid," Captain Glut ordered, and only then did he bother to look at Noselrubb.

"You were watching me all the time, weren't you?" Noselrubb said.

"Of course."

"I'm glad it's all over."

"Are you?" Captain Glut said grimly. He turned to Sergeant Kcut, a smirking, efficient hulk. "Advance time on the viewer to pick up those Crumzians when they come back to that tree.

In sharp, yellow light, the sergeant brought in the scene. Crumzians all over the meadow. They felled the tree with a noisy tool that was a great improvement over the axe. They cut branches from it and examined them curiously, even smelling them.

"Stupid things," Captain Glut said, "but they do have a sort of animal curiosity. Naturally, we couldn't let them cut you up like that. They might have learned something."

"What happens to me now?" Noselrubb asked.

The sergeant snickered.

In the detention room on Slupbh, Noselrubb listened to an assortment of goof-offs who were complaining that they had been framed. The lousy army had to hang its mistakes on someone, they said. Noselrubb was about to agree, when two of the loudest gripers disappeared, making only a gentle *splut!* and leaving behind them thin wisps of blue smoke.

After that, silence prevailed.

One by one the transgressors saw their names appear on a screen. SCRAMBLER in each case. Then only fat Glushing Zerog and Noselrubb were left. Their names appeared, and: CASES UNDER REVIEW.

"We've got a chance!" Noselrubb cried.

"Phlurgg!" said Zerog. "A fat one, I'll bet."

They waited nervously. "What was your offense?" Noselrubb inquired.

"I was a sidewalk in Cleveland. I got tired of crummy Crumzians

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walking all over me, so one night I rolled up and went to see a show. What did you—"

The screen lit up. CASES REVIEWED. SCRAMBLER.

Zerog rose. He was pale and shaking. Then he got hold of himself and grinned. "See you on the wart detail." He was projected through the wall.

When it came Noselrubb's time to go to the Scrambler, he tried to be casual like Zerog, but in spite of his best effort, he still held tightly to the bench he had been sitting on, and it was projected through the wall with him.

Slowly he drifted into a misty room with soothing green light. He heard soft music. He felt a sense of well being. The wall screen commanded: WALK FORWARD.

Noselrubb clutched the bench. "No!"

VERY WELL. THE SCRAMBLER WILL COME TO YOU.

Out of the misty green she came slowly, in filmy roundness, smiling, desirable. Noselrubb felt an overwhelming sensation of masterful strength, but he made one last effort to resist. He wrapped all his legs, as well as his arms, around the bench.

She drifted toward him, smiling, her arms extended. Noselrubb couldn't take it. He rose. He felt like he owned all of Phid and its ten galaxies. "Come here," he ordered.

Yellow light flooded the room suddenly. The Scrambler disappeared. The viewer screen pulsed with the words: SCRAMBLING OF NOSELRUBB CANCELLED.

Once more Noselrubb was a normal Phiddian male, scared and incompetent, but sneakily happy. He grabbed the bench. And then he was projected into the Colonel's office. The Colonel beamed at him warmly.

"Nice to see you again, Lieutenant Noselrubb."

"I—who?"

"You can put the bench down now." The Colonel shook his head. "A man of your intelligence assigned as a tree. Ridiculous! Be assured that I will have a little conference with Captain Glut. Indeed I will!" There was strain in the Colonel's smile, but still he smiled. "Well, I won't detain you longer. I know you're anxious to rush home to that—er—fine little wife of yours."

"You mean I'm clear?"

"Of course! Here's your commission with full weight in all Phiddian sub-civil affairs. If you wish to get your new uniform now . . ."

In the full dress uniform of a Phiddian lieutenant, wtih the fragrapholgts of sub-civil authority on his petryglumphs, Noselrubb went home to Lechtmi.

"You're handsome, Nosel!'

"I am?" Noselrubb got hold of himself. "Naturally."

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Lechtmi hugged him tightly.

"I came damn close to getting Scrambled, you know."

"Oh, you poor dear!"

Noselrubb shoved her out to arm's length. "As if you didn't know."

"I've got a wonderful meal cooked for you, Nosel." Lechtmi retreated toward the kitchen.

Noselrubb let her go. He went to a mirror and admired his fragrapholgts. By dash, he was slightly handsome. All at once he thought of Zerog. Why, with the authority now vested in Noselrubb, he could have Zerog off the wart detail in no time, and there must be treatments that could restore him to his normal self.

He strode to the kitchen. "There was a fellow with me that I sort of liked. He was Scrambled, but—"

"Glushing Zerog, you mean? He wasn't Scrambled. He—" Lechtmi covered her mouth.

"You and that blasted computer!"

"No, no, Nosel! I haven't touched it since you left. I swear! What we did was strictly intuitive, with no mathematics involved."

"We?"

"Mrs. Zerog and I. We knew that you and Glushing would foul —well, just weren't the types to buckle under to stupid military methods, so we tried to protect you a little. We investigated the Colonel. What we turned up about him and that round little alien aide of his—phlurgg!"

"Hmmn," said Noselrubb.

"When we laid it on the line to him, you should have seen him shake."

"Then good old Zerog is all right?"

"Just like you. He and his wife will be over for dinner tomorrow night."

"Good!" Noselrubb embraced Lechtmi. Just how extensive was miscegenation on Phid, anyway? Investigating the whole background might be a worthy project for him and Zerog. "You cut that Scrambling business mighty thin," he accused.

"The Colonel insisted. He had to save face. Besides, you and Zerog both drooled over his aide. You needed a little scare, Nosel."

Over Lechtmi's shoulder Noselrubb stared thoughtfully at the computer. Perhaps he and Zerog had best forego any investigation of miscegenation. "Forget the Colonel's aide," he said sternly.

Lechtmi sighed. "If you say so, Nosel." She shifted slightly in Noselrubb's embrace, so that he would not be poked by the small, new, improved portable computer she was wearing under her blouse.

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Jovian, Jove-like Dr. A., who has warned our world (alas, without visible effect) of the dangers of polluting our seas, herein tells us something new about a sea vaster than any of ours, and something which will affect one of the basic questions of our quest for outer space.

BY JOVE!

by Isaac Asimov

SUPPOSE WE ASK OURSELVES A QUESTION: ON WHAT WORLD OF the Solar system (other than Earth itself, of course) are we most likely to discover life?

I imagine I can plainly hear the unanimous answering shout of: *Mars!*

The argument goes, and I know it by heart, because I have used it myself a number of times, that Mars may be a little small and a little cold and a little short on air, but it isn't too small, too cold, or too airless to support the equivalent of primitive plant life. On the other hand, Venus and Mercury are definitely too hot, the Moon is airless, the remaining satellites of the Solar system, and the planetoids as well, (to say nothing of Pluto) are too cold, too small, or both.

And then we include a phrase which may go like this: "As for Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune, we can leave them out of consideration, altogether." I use a phrase like that constantly so that I don't have to think about the monsters, even.

However, Carl Sagan, an astronomer at the University of California,

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doesn't take this attitude at all, and a recent paper of his on the subject* has lured me into doing a bit of thinking on the subject of the outer planets.

Before Galileo's time, there was nothing to distinguish Jupiter and Saturn (Uranus and Neptune not having yet been discovered) from the other planets, except for the fact that they moved more slowly against the starry background than did the other planets and were, therefore, presumably farther from the earth.

The telescope, however, showed Jupiter and Saturn as discs with angular widths that could be measured. When the distances of the planets were determined, those angular widths could be converted into miles and the result was a shocker. As compared with an Earthly equatorial diameter of 7,950 miles, Jupiter's diameter across its equator was 88,800, while Saturn's was 75,100.

The outer planets were giants!

The discovery of Uranus in 1781 and Neptune in 1846 added two more not-quite-so-giants, for the equatorial diameter of Uranus is 31,000 miles and that of Neptune, at latest measurement, is about 28,000 miles.

The disparity in size between these planets and our own tight little world is even greater if one considers volume, because that varies as the cube of the diameter. In other words, if the diameter of Body A is ten times the diameter of Body B, then the volume of Body A is ten times ten times ten, or a thousand times the volume of Body B. Thus, if we set the volume of the Earth equal to 1, here are the volumes of the giants:

Jupiter	—	1,300
Saturn	—	750
Uranus	—	60
Neptune	—	40

Each of the giants has satellites. It is easy to determine the distance of the various satellites from the center of the primary planet by measuring the angular separation. It is also easy to time the period of revolution of the satellite. From those two pieces of data, one can quickly obtain the mass of the primary. (It is because Venus and Mercury have

Professor Sagan was kind enough to send me a reprint of the paper, knowing that I would be interested in the subject. I am very grateful to him and to some others who have been equally kind in the matter of calling their work to my attention.

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no satellites that we are less certain about their mass than we are about Neptune's, for instance.)

In terms of mass, the giants remain giants, naturally. If the mass of Earth is taken as 1, the masses of the giants are:

Jupiter	—	318
Saturn	—	95
Uranus	—	15
Neptune	—	17

The four giants contain virtually all the planetary mass of the Solar system—Jupiter alone possessing about 70 percent of the total. The remaining planets, plus all the satellites, planetoids, comets and, for that matter, meteoroids, contain well under 1 percent of the total planetary mass. Outside intelligences, exploring the Solar system with true impartiality, would be quite likely to enter the Sun in their records thus: star X, spectral class GO, 4 planets plus debris.

But take another look at the figures on mass. Compare them with those on volume and you will see the mass is consistently low. In other words, Jupiter takes up 1300 times as much room as the earth does, but contains only 318 times as much matter. The matter in Jupiter must therefore be spread out more loosely, which means, in more formal language, that Jupiter's density is less than that of the Earth.

If we set the Earth's density equal to 1, then we can obtain the densities of the giants by just dividing the figure for the relative mass by the figure for the relative volume. The densities of the giants are:

Jupiter	—	0.280
Saturn	—	0.125
Uranus	—	0.250
Neptune	—	0.425

On this same scale of densities, the density of water is 0.182. As you see, then, Neptune, the densest of the giants is only about 2¼ times as dense as water, while Jupiter and Uranus are only 1½ times as dense, and Saturn is actually less dense than water.

I remember seeing an astronomy book, which dramatized this last fact by stating that if one could find an ocean large enough, Saturn would float in it, less than three-fourths submerged. And there was a very impressive illustration, showing Saturn, rings and all, floating in a choppy sea.

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But don't misinterpret this matter of density. The first thought anyone might naturally have is that because Saturn's overall density is less than that of water, it must be made of some cork-like material. This, however, is not so, as I can explain easily.

Jupiter has a striped or banded appearance and certain features upon its visible surface move around the planet at a steady rate. By following those features, the period of rotation can be determined with a high degree of precision and turns out to be 9 hours 50 minutes and 30 seconds. (With increasing difficulty, the period of rotation can be determined for the more distant giants as well.)

But here a surprising fact is to be noted. The period of rotation I have given is that of Jupiter's equatorial surface. Other portions of the surface rotate a bit more slowly. In fact, Jupiter's period of rotation increases steadily as the poles are approached. This alone indicates we are not looking at a solid surface, for that would have to rotate all in one piece.

The conclusion is quite clear. What we see as the surface of Jupiter, and of the other giants, are the clouds of its atmosphere. Beneath those clouds must be a great depth of atmosphere, far thicker than our own, and yet far less dense than rock and metal. It is because the atmosphere of the giant planets is counted in with their volume that their density appears so low. If we took into account only the core of the planet, underlying the atmosphere, we would find a density as great as that of Earth's, or, most likely, greater.

But how deep is the atmosphere?

Consider that, fundamentally, the giant planets differ from the Earth chiefly in that, being further from the sun and therefore colder through their history, they retain a much larger quantity of the light elements: hydrogen, helium, carbon, nitrogen and oxygen. Helium forms no compounds but remains as a gas. Hydrogen is present in large excess so it remains as a gas, too, but it also forms compounds with carbon, nitrogen and oxygen, to form methane, ammonia and water. Methane is a gas, and, at Earth's temperature, so is ammonia, but water is a liquid. If Earth's temperature were to drop to —100° C or below, both ammonia and water would be solid, but methane would still be a gas.

As a matter of fact, all this is not merely guess work. Spectroscopic evidence does indeed show that Jupiter's atmosphere is hydrogen and helium in a three-to-one ratio with liberal admixtures of ammonia and methane. (Water is not detected but that may be assumed to be frozen out.)

Now the structure of the earth can be portrayed as a central solid

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body of rock and metal (the lithosphere), surrounded by a layer of water (the hydrosphere) which is, in turn surrounded by a layer of gas (the atmosphere).

The light elements in which the giant planets are particularly rich would add to the atmosphere and the hydrosphere, but not so much to the lithosphere. The picture would therefore be of a central lithosphere, larger than that of the Earth, but not necessarily enormously larger, surrounded by a gigantic hydrosphere and an equally gigantic atmosphere.

But how gigantic is gigantic?

Here we can take into consideration the polar flattening of the giants. Thus, although Jupiter is 88,800 miles in diameter along the equator, it is only 82,800 miles in diameter from pole to pole. This is a flattening of 7 percent, as compared to a flattening of about ⅓ of 1 percent for the Earth. Jupiter has a visibly elliptical appearance for that reason. Saturn is even more extreme, for its equatorial diameter is 75,100 miles while its polar diameter is 66,200 for a flattening of nearly 12 percent. (Uranus and Neptune are less flattened than are the two larger giants.)

Now the amount of flattening depends partly on the velocity of rotation and the centrifugal effect which is set up. Jupiter and Saturn although far larger than the earth have periods of rotation of about 10 hours as compared with our own 24. Thus, the Jovian surface, at its equator, is moving at a rate of 25,000 miles an hour, while Earth's equatorial surface moves only at a rate of 1,000 miles an hour. Naturally, Jupiter's surface is thrown farther outward than Earth's is (even against Jupiter's greater gravity) so that the giant planet bulges more at the equator and is more flattened at the poles.

However, Saturn is distinctly smaller than Jupiter and has a period of rotation some twenty minutes longer than Jupiter has. It exerts a smaller centrifugal effect at the equator and even allowing for its smaller gravity, it should be less flattened at the poles than Jupiter is. However, it is more flattened. The reason for this is that the degree of flattening depends also on the distribution of density, and if Saturn's atmosphere is markedly thicker than Jupiter's, flattening will be greater.

Rupert Wildt of Yale estimated what the size of the lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere would have to be on each planet in order to give it the overall density it was observed to have plus its polar flattening. The figures I have seen (in secondary sources, and not in Wildt's original papers, I hasten to admit) are included in the following table, to which I add figures for the Earth as a comparison:

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	Lithosphere (radius in miles)	Hydrosphere (thickness in miles)	Atmosphere (thickness in miles)
Jupiter	18,500	17,000	8,000
Saturn	14,000	8,000	16,000
Uranus	7,000	6,000	3,000
Neptune	6,000	6,000	2,000
Earth	3,975	2	8*

As you see, Saturn, though smaller than Jupiter, is pictured as having a much thicker atmosphere, which accounts for its low overall density and its unusual degree of flattening. Neptune has the shallowest atmosphere and is therefore the densest of the giant planets.

Furthermore, you can see that the Earth isn't *too* pigmyish in comparison with the giants, if the lithosphere alone is considered. If we assume that the lithospheres are all of equal density and set the mass of Earth's lithosphere equal to 1, then the masses of the others are:

Jupiter	—	100
Saturn	—	45
Uranus	—	5½
Neptune	—	3½

It is the disparity of the hydrosphere and atmosphere that blows up the giants to so large a size.

To emphasize this last fact, it would be better to give the size of the various components in terms of volume rather than of thickness. The volumes are therefore given in the following table, in trillions of cubic miles and, once again, Earth is included for purposes of comparison:

	Lithosphere volume	Hydrosphere volume	Atmosphere volume
Jupiter	27	161	155
Saturn	11.5	33	185
Uranus	1.4	7.8	8.4
Neptune	0.9	6.4	4.2
Earth	0.26	0.00033	0.0011

**I know that the atmosphere is thicker than 8 miles, and that in fact it has no fixed thickness. However, I am taking Earth's atmosphere, and shall later calculate its volume, only to the top of its cloud layers, which is what we do for the giant planets.*

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As you can see at a glance, the lithosphere of the giant planets makes up only a small part of the total volume, whereas it makes up almost all the volume of the Earth. This shows up more plainly, if we set up the volume of each component as a percentage of its planet's total volume. Thus:

	Lithosphere (% of planet's volume)	Hydrosphere (% of planet's volume)	Atmosphere (% of planet's volume)
Jupiter	7.7	47.0	45.3
Saturn	4.8	14.4	80.8
Uranus	8.0	44.3	47.7
Neptune	8.0	55.5	36.5
Earth	99.45	0.125	0.425

The difference can't be made plainer. Whereas the Earth is about 99½ percent lithosphere, the giant planets are only 8 percent, or less, lithosphere. About ⅓ of Neptune's apparent volume is gas. In the case of Jupiter and Uranus, the gas volume is ½ the total, and in the case of Saturn, the least dense of the four, the gas volume is fully ⅘ of the total. The giant planets are sometimes called the "gas giants" and, as you see, that is a good name, particularly for Saturn.

This is a completely alien picture we have drawn of the giant planets. The atmospheres are violently poisonous, extremely deep and completely opaque, so that the surface of the planet is entirely and permanently dark even on the "sunlit side." The atmospheric pressure is gigantic and from what we can see of the planets, the atmosphere seems to be beaten into the turmoil of huge storms.

The temperatures of the planets are usually estimated as ranging from a —100° C. maximum for Jupiter to a —230° C. minimum for Neptune, so that even if we could survive the buffeting and the pressures and the poisons of the atmosphere, we would land on a gigantic planet-covering, thousands-of-miles-thick layer of ammoniated ice.

Not only is it inconceivable for man to land and live on such a planet, but it seems inconceivable that any life at all that even remotely resembles our own could live there.

Are there any loopholes in this picture?

Yes, a very big one, possibly, and that is the question of the temperature. Jupiter may not be nearly as cold as we have thought.

To be sure, it is about five times as far from the Sun as we are so

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that it received only 1/25 as much solar radiation. However, the crucial point is not how much radiation it receives but how much it keeps. Of the light it receives from the Sun, 4/9 is reflected and the remaining 5/9 is absorbed. The absorbed portion does not penetrate to the planetary surface as light, but it gets there just the same—as heat.

The planet would ordinarily re-radiate this heat as long-wave infra-red, but the components of Jupiter's atmosphere, notably the ammonia and methane are quite opaque to infra-red, which is therefore retained forcing the temperature to rise. It is only when the temperature is quite high that enough infra-red can force its way out of the atmosphere to establish an equilibrium temperature.

It is even possible that the surface temperature of Jupiter, thanks to this "greenhouse effect", is as high as that of Earth. This is not a matter of theory only, for the radio wave emission by Jupiter, discovered first in 1955, seems to indicate an atmospheric temperature considerably higher than that which had long been considered likely.

The other giant planets may also have temperatures higher than those usually estimated, but the final equilibrium would very likely be lower than that of Jupiter's since the other planets are further from the Sun. Perhaps Jupiter is the only giant planet with a surface temperature above 0° C.

This means that Jupiter, of all the giant planets, would be the only one with a liquid hydrosphere. Jupiter would have a vast ocean, covering the entire planet (by the Wildt scheme) and 17,000 miles deep.

On the other hand, Venus also has an atmosphere that exerts a greenhouse effect, raising its surface temperature to a higher level than had been supposed. Radio-wave emission from Venus indicates its surface temperature to be higher than the boiling point of water, so that the surface of Venus is powdery dry with all its water supply in the cloud layer over head.

A strange picture. The planetary ocean that has been so time-honored a science-fictional picture of Venus has been pinned to the wrong planet all along. It is Jupiter that has the world-wide ocean, by Jove!

Considering the Jovian ocean, Professor Sagan (to whom I referred at the beginning of this article) says: "At the present writing, the possibility of life on Jupiter seems somewhat better than the possibility of life on Venus."

This is a commendably cautious statement, and as far as a scientist can be expected to go in a learned journal. However, I, myself, on this particular soap-box, don't have to be cautious at all. I can be much more sanguine about the Jovian ocean. Let's consider it for a moment.

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If we accept Wildt's picture, it is a big ocean, nearly 500,000 times as large as Earth's and, in fact 620 times as voluminous as all the Earth. This ocean is under the same type of atmosphere that, according to current belief, surrounded the Earth at the time life developed on our planet. All the simple molecules, methane, ammonia, water, dissolved salts, would be present in unbelievable plenty by Earthly standards.

Some source of energy is required for the building up of these organic molecules and the most obvious one is the ultraviolet radiation of the sun. The quantity of ultraviolet that reaches Jupiter is, as aforesaid, only 1/25 that which reaches the earth and none of it can get very far into the thick atmosphere.

Nevertheless, the ultraviolet must have some effect because the colored bands in the Jovian atmosphere are very likely to consist of free radicals (that is, energetic molecular fragments) produced out of ordinary molecules by the ultra-violet.

The constant writhing of the atmosphere would carry the free radicals downward where they could transfer their energy by reacting with simple molecules to build up complex ones.

Even if ultraviolet light is discounted as an energy source, two other sources remain. There is first, lightning. Lightning in the thick soup that is called a Jovian atmosphere may be far more energetic and continuous than it ever is or was on Earth. Secondly, there is always natural radioactivity.

Well, then, why can't the Jovian ocean breed life? The temperature is right. The raw material is there. The energy supply is present. All the requirements that were sufficient to produce life in Earth's primordial ocean are present also on Jupiter (if the picture drawn in this article is correct), only more and better.

One might wonder whether life could withstand the Jovian atmospheric pressures and storms, to say nothing of the Jovian gravity. But the storms, however violent, could only roil up the outer skin of a 17,000-mile-deep ocean. A few hundred feet below the surface; or a mile below, if you like; there would be nothing but the slow ocean currents.

As for gravity; forget it. Life within the ocean can ignore gravity altogether, for buoyancy neutralizes its effects; or almost neutralizes it.

No, none of the objections stand up. To be sure, life must originate and develop in the absence of gaseous oxygen, but that is exactly the condition under which life originated and developed on Earth. There are living creatures on Earth right now that can live without oxygen.

So once again let's ask the question: On what world of the Solar sys-

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tem (other than Earth itself, of course) are we most likely to discover life?

And now, it seems to me, the answer must be: On Jupiter, by Jove!

Of course, life on Jupiter would be pitifully isolated. It would have a vast ocean to live in but the far, far vaster outside universe would be closed forever to them.

Even if some forms of Jovian life developed an intelligence comparable to our own (and there are reasonable arguments to suggest that true sea-life—and before you bring up the point, dolphins are descendants of land-living creatures—would not develop such intelligence) they could do nothing to break the isolation.

It is highly unlikely that even a man-like intelligence could devise methods that would carry itself out of the ocean, through thousands of miles of violent, soup-like atmosphere, against Jupiter's colossal gravity, in order to reach Jupiter's inmost satellite and, from its alien surface, observe the universe.

And as long as life remained in the Jovian ocean, it would receive no indication of an outside universe, except for a nondirected flow of heat, and excessively feeble microwave radiation from the sun and a few other spots. Considering the lack of supporting information, the microwaves would be as indecipherable a phenomenon as one could imagine, even if it were sensed.

But let's not be sad; let's end on a cheerful note.

If the Jovian ocean is as rich in life as our own is, then 1/70,000 of its mass would be living matter. In other words, the total mass of sea-life on Jupiter would then be ⅛ the mass of our Moon, and that's a lot of mass for a mess of fish.

What fishing-grounds Jupiter would make if it could be reached somehow.

And, in view of our population explosion, just one question to ponder over— Do you suppose that Jovian life might be edible?

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BOOKS

From time to time this department invites eminent authors, artists, scientists and critics to contribute their thoughts on science fiction. This month's guest is the great Fritz Leiber, who needs no introduction. Hear him on the provocative issue of the status of the science fiction author in a status-seeking world.—**Alfred Bester**

MUTTERINGS FROM UNDERGROUND

by Fritz Leiber

ONE OF MY SPIES INFORMS ME that the math labs are exploring hyperspace. So far the fourth-dimensional routes from A to B have all turned out to be longer than a straight line—the freeway along which we will travel faster than light still has its roadsigns masked. However, the subtle geometers have barely scratched the Riemannian surface with their long squeaky fingernails.

For a science-fiction writer to employ spies is very likely unpatriotic and certainly nonsensical, since he can't possibly pay them. But I sometimes bog down halfway through Scientific American. Or I get worn out making the abrupt transition from the journalistic lead of Science Service releases to the jargonesque second paragraph. Really there's a lot to be said for getting your science briefings from a slinky blonde wearing dark glasses and carrying a Geiger counter in her gold mesh handbag. And then the Manhattan

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Project *did* set an enduring unhappy precedent and there *is* that gray-flannel-cloaked figure y-clept Security of which I almost catch a glimpse every time I whirl around very quickly in an otherwise empty room.

The same people who used to blat at me, "Shut up! That's pulp-magazine hokum!" whenever I brought up some little innocent scientifictive speculation, now blat, "Shut up! That's classified information!" Or with elaborate casualness they change the subject—perhaps telling me about the Chess-and-Go club that Astro-Blank-Atomics has just opened to all badge-bearing employees—which can be even more frustrating.

Meanwhile, from an unspecified location behind a tree-trunk, Pink Wastebasket writes me: "Do you know how to build one hecku-va big solid fuel rocket? First, you cast big pie-shaped pieces of solid fuel, just small enough to fit one to a flat-car . . . They have an incentive-type safety program, and every time they reach a certain number of man-hours without an accident, everybody in the plant gets to choose a present from a list which includes a corn popper, a .22 target rifle, a roulette wheel, a hair dryer, a new bowling ball . . ."

I pick rockets for this illustration and stress the homely details because when I went to work for the popularized-science periodical Science Digest in 1944 the managing editor believed spaceflight was a pipe dream and he banned articles on high rocketry from the magazine.

Things have changed just a bit since then. In fact they—and the managing editor—had already changed when I left Science Digest in 1956 to get back into science fiction in time for the great magazine-folding year of 1958.

Now I derive an evil satisfaction, though little other profit, from contemplating the millions of people forced to take Sputnik, Bikini, and Maniac seriously, who spent the previous half century scoffing at such nightmares as juvenile claptrap.

Mom used to raid Sonny's closet for trash magazines about monstrous life on the moon. Now when she reads her own slick magazines she has to leaf hurriedly past articles by pompous Germans high in the U. S. space force explaining how Sonny will live on garbage transformed by algae into tasty puddings when he goes to the moon himself.

Dad once was able to enjoy himself hugely proving that spaceflight would be as useless as polar exploration. (Gad, the number of sober folk who squawked at the "dangers and waste" of the tiny privately-financed expeditions of Scott, Shackleton, Amundson, and Byrd!) Now Dad must content

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himself with grumbling at the taxes he pays to support spaceflight. While abstractly artistic fullpage and double-spread ads in his business magazines inform him that all the bigger and sounder industrial firms are in the thick, or rather the vacuum-thin of the circumambient ether.

Sonny, instead of savoring his evil trash magazines in delicious secrecy—a rebel with a glorious cause—now has to clip them along with the newspapers and news magazines to make dull project-scrapbooks to satisfy his teacher. (Alack and alas, Spaceflight has been taken away from the people who really love her! Certes, she once silver-slim and Diana-elusive is now but a common whore who beddeth with fat merchants, horny-handed ironsmiths, rough soldiers, and eke the king himself!)

Sis, instead of being able to giggle at the goofs in transparent helmets of whom her brother was childishly enamored, now is tactfully advised that she might do worse than reserve her firm young body to solace such a goof after his "triple time above the tropopause" sentry-goes in the void.

Generals have to ask the Commander in Chief for billions of dollars to further a kind of warfare that during the previous quarter century was waged only in offtrail pulp magazines.

Politicians must explain to their crusty constituents why Cripple Creek hasn't yet a rocket base and a chance to cash the fat paychecks the base employees would bring to town.

Advertising copy writers have to brush up on their planetary positions and color-optics before creating a blurb for a lip salve named Ultra Red or Mars Magenta. And hire an astronomer to check the artwork.

Idea men of the movies and TV must sift the literature of science fiction and fantasy to find nuggets of situation and plot suitable for reworking and presentation by their respective mass media. This formulation begs the question of whether or not science fiction and fantasy are literature—a profitless query which will inevitably be answered (doubtless in very stupid fashion) by the favorite literary sages of our great grandchildren. For our own time it is enough to know that there is a literature of science fiction in the same sense that there is a literature of rocketry and atomics patents, coaltar derivitives, antibiotics, and so on. Meaning that there is a large body of published material that can be searched, more or less legitimately, for profitable ideas. In other words, published science fiction has become one of this planet's natural resources along with coal, oil, and tidal power. An example or two:

Rod Serling mines fantasy and

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science fiction to produce Twilight Zone.

The New Yorker, literary bellwether, regularly runs cartoons that are simply epitomes of science-fiction stories of the somewhat overworked paradox variety. January 13 showed a pathetically thirsty little monster wandering off from a wrecked saucer through an obviously terrestrial desert and crying "Ammonia! Ammonia!" (The trouble with paradox is that it can be too easy. Want to feel hot and cold at the same time with the same sensory receptors? Touch a light bulb as you turn it on.) These capsule science fiction stories are the same sort of literary litmus as the cartoon supernatural-horror tales with which Charles Addams has long chilled and amused us.

Anthologizers, both the hard-cover and those lacking chitinous exoskeletons, have found a richer mine in the science-fiction peaks than anywhere else—even adventure flats, love hollow, horror hills and the detective bad lands.

Now you would think that with the outstanding success of science fiction as a prose form and a predictive medium, its writers and readers would today be revered as wise men for having foreseen such developments as space-flight, cybernetic machines and atomic power decades in advance—or at the least for having very early dug out and appreciated the significance of the work of such obscure scientists as Goddard and Oberth.

Instead we find a determined effort on the part of society to ignore the existence of such writers and readers, or to prove that they are as credulous fools as always.

True, no one says any longer, "Spaceflight is Buck Rogers stuff, science-fiction magazine hokum." The way the missiles-executive now phrases it is, "The kind of spaceflight we are pioneering is *not* Buck Rogers stuff or science-fiction magazine hokum." I speak for Buck with some authority, having introduced starships and faster-than-light telegraphy to the 25th Century while composing four continuities for the strip during the past couple years—long enough to discover that a balloon is not something filled with hydrogen and steered by Jules Verne, but a container for equally explosive dialogue which floats in panels and may be tethered to a person, a building, a spaceship, or even a planet (though hardly to a weird-looking extraterrestrial, since the current management is a bit skeptical about those).

Some stuffy scientists and academicians still squeak, whenever they can grab hold of the microphone, that journalists and science-fiction writers are misinterpreting and exaggerating their pristine concepts. Recently, for instance, in G. T. Guilbaud's *What Is Cybernetics?* I ran across the

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hoary protest that electronic machines should never *never* be called brains. It seems French newsmen find irresistible a cross-language pun on "*servo*-mechanism" and "*cerveau* electronique" (brain electronic). Incidentally, the only sensation-seekers I ever ran into at Science Digest were a couple of doctors who wanted big-headline claims made in jumbo feature articles they hoped we'd write about drugs they'd briefly been testing. Another medic castigated me for journalistic espionage when I submitted to him the carbon of an article I'd based on a semi-public lecture he'd delivered —and then was obviously disappointed when we didn't go ahead and publish over his protest.

Mainstream writers duck into our field to achieve or perpetrate a novel and then slip rapidly out again, protesting that they were somewhere else all the time or at worst only slumming. When I complimented Robert Graves on his masterly *Watch the North-wind Rise* (*Seven Days in New Crete* in England), he hastily replied, "Oh, but that's not science fiction." Mr. Graves seems to feel that science-fiction writers are nothing but propagandists for machinery. Despite some obvious exceptions, there is considerable truth in this generalization; the robot, for instance, can best be understood as the personification of the machine—any machine—assuring fearful humans, "You needn't be scared of me. I'm a good guy, here to serve you." And perhaps there *is* danger that robots will become so glamorous that humans will be tempted to change by degrees their flesh and blood for metal, judging from an incident related to me by a colleague of Pink Wastebasket.

"There was this quartet of people," Brown Study said, "who were tired of civilization and intended to live permanently on a Pacific Island off South America. Although all young, they decided to end dental troubles by all having all their teeth out and in good 20th Century style substituting stainless steel. They even decided to have plain bars instead of dentilations—one upper tooth and one long lower, so to speak. But once they were fixed up in this way they quarreled, and never left Chicago. The only real result is that people leave them alone when there is a fight anywhere. It would be horrid to have an ear chewed off by robot teeth."

But no matter how subtly symbolic or wildly humorous we make our robots, or how shrewdly we handle our space-torques and time-machines, many writers and some intellectuals and a few just plain folks continue to be made uncomfortable by science fiction. I don't mind seeing people made uncomfortable, especially such true escapists as those who work in de-

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fense plants and would rather not know what they're helping manufacture, but disturbingness alone is insufficient to explain the eagerness with which a few precious critics maintain that science fiction is disreputable, disorienting, and downright dangerous to sanity if taken in larger than homeopathic doses.

It seems to me that the situation of the other literary forms with science fiction in their midst is like that of a respectable family with a crackpot uncle who is forever going off prospecting for gold with a donkey, a stubbly red beard, a pack of unregimented fleas, and a general unwashed smell. One day he strikes it rich. He finds himself the family hero, his gold is immensely popular, but he soon discovers that just as before the family wants neither him nor his donkey in the house when visitors call. For one thing they might have to explain to people what fools they were not to believe in his dreams, and no one ever likes to do that.

The family keeps advising the old prospector to put his gold in the family strongbox and go off on another expedition. (While he is away they will be able to make money out of denatured accounts of his adventures, maybe even train and exhibit his fleas.) He did pretty well, they tell him, prospecting the Space Pinnacles and the Atomic Desert—now why doesn't he try, say, the Old Psionic Mountains, or investigate the rumors of rich ore-bearing muds in Psychology Pswamp, or simply explore another route up the Pinnacles and across the Desert and over the Biologic Bluffs and through the Robotic Ravines?

This hardly disinterested advice is nevertheless, I believe, the best that can be given the old prospector (save for the detail of keeping his gold in his own strongbox). The genius of science fiction lies in action, in risk-taking, in the exploration of the unknown. Or to give it a more distinguished title, it lies in the making of an artistic amateur sort of *Gedankenexperimenten,* meaning those technologically unfeasible experiments which can be made only in the researcher's thoughts. The prize example is Einstein imagining a man in a windowless rocket accelerating at a steady one G and unable to distinguish this force from that of gravitation—and there is solid satisfaction in remembering that Einstein had to indulge in a scientifictive fancy in order to create the General Theory of Relativity.

I don't mean by this that there is one true sort of science fiction (*"Das Gedankenexperiment, Herr Professor!"*) and the others false, but rather that there is something empty about the tale that uses the spaceship and the robot and the futurian revolution against the tyranny of the advertising execu-

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tives merely as colorful window dressing in the same way that some adventure tales employ the cloaks and swords of any convenient historical era—even perchance the cryptic one called to my attention by the sometimes-facetious Green Rerouter:

> *Vol. XXXI, "The Rewoolthzia Epoch"*
> After the interNeopolitan War of 2160, the Immacians retreated into the states of the Horse Nebula, where the remnants of the Hvorian Waves had decreed the impossibility of momism. Then, as though from nowhere, the Order of the Zodiacal Fishbiters arose, and they were unrecorded.
> —Chammus of Sinkoburb

A science-fiction writer should study his science with diligence and passion. Yet too much purism, whereby the artist would use only expert-vetted materials and eschew currently disreputable theories, could be deadly. In a burst of enthusiasm for scientific plausibility, ASTOUNDING once decreed that an intelligent extraterrestrial had to be at least as big as a collie dog, since anything smaller couldn't support a brain with the number of neurons needed for ratiocination. A helpful rule, no question, yet I'm glad it didn't deter Katherine MacLean from writing "Pictures Don't Lie" about intelligent beings so tiny that their spaceship sinks in a teacup-size mud puddle, or Ted Sturgeon from dreaming "Killdozer," wherein a purely electronic mind takes over a piece of earth-moving machinery.

Nevertheless, the collie-dog rule has been positively stimulating: it led Hal Clement to imagine in *Needle* a being with featherweight molecules replacing heavyweight ones and so able to think as smartly as Sherlock Holmes though weighing only a couple of pounds. The point is that the writer should never forget science; its strictures are as vital and challenging to him as the form of the sonnet is to the poet; even when he sets the impossible marching he should keep science in all its branches sniping at his crazy creation; even when busy creating a fiction stranger than truth, he must never scuttle the truth itself, for as Fielding says of the novel, "Truth distinguishes our writings from those idle romances which are filled with monsters, the productions, not of nature, but of disordered brains."

But there is this that distinguishes science fiction's *Gedankenexperimenten* from those of science herself: the s-f ones may range from sober likelihood to whimsy and sheer insanity, from stuff just across the border of established fact to the wildest crackpottery. Even the purist can't deny that the science-fiction mind has been fruitfully impregnated by

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alchemy, flying saucers, transmigration of souls, hyperintelligent cavemen, hollow-earth theories, and endless other species of nonsense. Plato invoked the Atlantis myth the better to objectify his theories of government, and more than two millenia later that particular science-fiction gambit was still going strong, as when Edgar Rice Burroughs transferred to a Mars already enlivened with the remarkable canal systems of Percival Lowell the Atlantis of the theosophists populated by all Helena Blavatsky's Seven Great Races.

What the purist can legitimately demand is that wherever the author take off from, he be completely honest, remember science, keep his eyes open, and see all he can—not flinch from any dark wall in popular or scientific world-view or in his own mind. The science-fiction writer's noblest task is this: to awaken, in a story, a world on the very edge of impossibility, and then, in the midst of the story, on the verge between the written and the unwritten, to study and search with all the passion of a scientist scrutinizing his experiment, or an analyst his patient's thought-stream, or a Holmes a Moriarty, or a lover his beloved.

And if, in such a wild pursuit, the science-fiction writer fail to achieve ungrudging recognition, or if the science-fiction reader lack the wholehearted approval of his peers, neither should grieve.

It's clearly a case of the old adage: Prophets are without honor on their own planet.

Perhaps, therefore, the Martians will be the ones duly to honor us science-fiction folk. But I rather imagine the Space Force PR boys will tell their story to the Martians first. Just before he bows out of the communal burrow of the Giant Black Beetles, Ralph-12BB-4U will very casually let slip this afterthought: "Oh by the way, some terrestrials known as science-fictionites will eventually be coming along, claiming it was all their idea that we get in touch with you in the first place. They're quite harmless—but don't believe a word they say."

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From ancient and beautiful Prague, host to the golem and home of the robot, comes the second of three stories by Czechoslovak psychiatrist Dr. Nesvadba. And asks certain questions about love, science, and the human heart. . .

THE EINSTEIN BRAIN

by Josef Nesvadba

"THE SITUATION IS EXTREMELY serious," Professor Kozhevkin brought his report to a close. "During the life of the last few generations our progress in various technical fields has liberated mankind, freed humanity from drudgery, hunger and war, and opened the way to the Universe. I can still remember the time when the Engineering Faculties of our Universities had the pick of the finest students, and when it was the heart's desire of every young man to study a branch of technical science. Look at things today! Our young people have lost interest in what we are doing. Physics, chemistry and mathematics suddenly seem to have lost all interest for them. Every year fewer and fewer students apply for admission to our Engineering Faculty in Alma-Ata. There is a danger that in a few years we shall find ourselves obliged to restrict our research work and set limits to the number of staff employed. This state of affairs cannot be allowed to go on. Our machines cannot work without people in control, they cannot take care of the needs of mankind unless someone is running them. Energetic measures must be taken."

We all clapped and Dr. Kozhevhin sat down.

"At our University in Toronto," Professor Clark Smith-Jones took the floor, "things are almost worse. We have already had to shut down several specialized departments for certain aspects of space research and the Department for Research into the Nature of Elementary Particles. While students flock to hear lectures on Goethe or Herder's views on art, we were forced to give up the gymnasium to the aesthetics lecturer, although when the University was founded his department was so insignificant it was almost forgotten. And what is so shocking about it all, is that we

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cannot imagine how this state of affairs was brought about. Is it the natural desire of the younger generation to rebel against their parents and do something different? Or is it some kind of unconscious protest (here Professor Kozhevkin permitted himself a smile) against figures as the symbol of order and therefore the symbol of paternal authority? Out psychologists have been studying the matter for a long time without coming to any conclusion, alas."

We clapped again and Professor Smith-Jones sat down. For a while there was an uncomfortable silence. Nobody felt like going on with the discussion. They were afraid to speak up. And yet the reasons for this changing trend have been known long enough. I decided to speak myself.

"There is no point in refusing to face the truth," I got down to brass tacks at once. "We've come to the end of our resources. We've reached a dead-end. It is true that since the end of the nineteenth century the technical sciences have transformed the world and thrown all other branches of knowledge into the shade; they have made it possible for humanity to devote itself to more important tasks and so on and so forth. We are all aware of these things. But technical progress has not solved the fundamental problems of the human mind. People are still asking how and why we should live, we still know nothing of how the universe came into being, and we still cannot understand the fourth dimension Einstein worked out. Whenever we set this question to our cybernetic machines they refuse it as unscientific, wrongly set out, too personal, private, human. But this does not make the question any the less important for every one of us. Professor Smith-Jones and Professor Kozhevkin both have the most ingeniously equipped laboratories that can be imagined; their brain machines solve in three seconds mathematical problems that would take even a clever mathematician a lifetime to work out—but these machines cannot answer our fundamental questions. And so we find ourselves in a vicious circle. Physics has become a practical branch of science, and the extent to which it is dependent on philosophy is becoming clearer day by day; it's about the same as the way lacemaking is dependent on the artist's design. That is why we are losing the interest of the younger generation. We are not concerned with the fundamental things of life. We have ended where we began. We can make machines which do the washing or the cooking most efficiently, perform surgical operations and fly through space, just as our forefathers hundreds of years ago made mechanical pianoplayers and dancing bears. They used to display their inventions at

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circuses. Thoughtful people considered these inventors no more than toy-makers, charlatans. The same fate menaces us."

Nobody clapped. Perhaps I had laid it on a bit thick. Smith-Jones was frowning and the others were muttering to each other.

"What have you got against my machines, madam?" Professor Smith-Jones leaped to his feet. "With the exception of the brain machines constructed by Professor Kozhevkin (here he bowed) they are the most efficient brain machines in the world. Nobody present here today can claim to have such a fine brain. Not even you, madam . . ."

"I do not think as fast, or as faultlessly, you are right. But I can think up new problems, I can keep all your machines occupied dealing with my doubts and ignorance, and I like watching the sunset . . ." Smith-Jones was smiling ironically. As if he regretted having bothered to reply to a woman colleague of so little importance. He, one of the greatest brains in the scientific world.

"It is of course true that our brain machines cannot understand the fourth dimension, and can only describe the secrets of the universe . . ." Professor Kozhevkin admitted, and seemed to be sorry. "From the point of view of the physical sciences the question is of course wrongly set out."

"That is why I suggest constructing a biological brain," I took the floor again, "because it would be more human than your mechanical brains, and would be able to understand. A real knowledge machine."

"The Einstein brain?" Smith-Jones smiled again, scornfully. His joke decided the name for my experiment. From then on everybody talked about the well-known business of the Einstein brain.

My plan was a simple one; I had already discussed it with physiologists and biologists. With the help of special apparatus we would find the three most capable brains recently dead, and condense them by a special process to make one single organ which would be subjected to electrical stimulation after the resuscitation processes.

On the day fixed for the experiment I sent my assistants into all the regional hospitals; they were equipped with special ratiometers. The most capable brains were shown to be those of a professor of architecture who was killed by a fall from some scaffolding, and a little known poet. We took his brain, bearing in mind Einstein's aphorism that imagination is more important than knowledge. As the third brain we took what of Mrs. Anna Novak, who had been killed in a road accident. Her brain gave us great food for thought. She was a housewife and the mother of a family, who had never achieved

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very much in her life, and yet our apparatus recorded the greatest capacity precisely in this brain. We believed these recordings and started the work of condensing; it was of course a long and difficult business. But everything went according to plan and the experiment proper could begin.

I fed the brain a basic physical education, and applied electrical stimulation to the appropriate area. The electric current appeared to act as an inspiration stimulating the brain to emit its conclusions promptly by means of small antennae situated on the surface. On our infinitely sensitive recorder we registered the answer, which seemed to confirm some of the hypotheses put forward by Professor Kozhevkin. I sent off a telegram to Alma-Ata straight away. Kozhevkin's hypotheses had been published only recently, in physics journals. Certainly neither a professor of architecture, nor a poet, nor a housewife, were likely to have been readers of physics journals. It would appear, then, that my brain had evolved these conclusions independently.

The weeks which followed were joyful indeed. The brain emitted further solutions, developed Kozhevkin's hypotheses further, worked out combinations of these results and came to conclusions which even the Professor himself had not yet dared to make public. But there was one unfortunate thing about the brain. It was irregular. I was worried about it. The brain did not seem able to get used to a regular working day. It stopped responding promptly to stimulation. Sometimes it would answer the stimulation with a foolish remark, as though it was trying to make a joke. Or it would work at night, when I was no longer in the laboratory, as though it had "saved up" the stimulating energy we had applied to it.

A month later the brain stopped working altogether. It was "alive" —to express the state more intelligibly I should say that an intricate metabolism maintained by another electric appliance continued to take place in the tissue, but the electrical stimulation no longer produced responses. The experiment seemed to be a failure.

Just at that time I received a letter from Professor Kozhevkin, who sent me an article he was publishing the following month in the Science Magazine. His work agreed with the conclusions reached by my artificial brain. Both the Professor and my brain seemed at last to be on the track of a fundamental solution to a profound problem. And my brain had chosen just this moment to go on strike. I was wondering how I could repair it, when I got the idea of making a special apparatus by means of which the brain could "talk", that is to say it could dic-

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tate its answers and make any other remarks it wanted to. It does seem a bit terrifying, I know, but I thought that if I gave the brain a well-known man's voice, say the television announcer's, the effect would not be so inhuman. In a few days my brain was able to "talk". What were its first words? They had nothing to do with scientific hypotheses.

"You are neglecting me," it said.

That was a surprise indeed. I had thought that electrical stimulation could take the place of any rewarding impulse. It now became suddenly clear that we still had not mastered affectivity, and that we could not find any substitute for the feelings of security and pleasure man derives from his relations with those near and dear to him; no chemical reaction could supply this. This was the first conclusion to which my experiment had led me. And so I had to have recourse to an old-fashioned method. I began to take care of my invention personally. I moved into the laboratory to be near it, and talked to it night and day. My colleagues could not understand me. Some of them said I must have fallen in love with the television announcer and spent my time enjoying his voice. There were others who thought I'd just gone mad.

But I soon began to understand my "brain" easily, and even took down its answers when the dictaphone happened to be out of order. But a fortnight later we had another breakdown. The brain seemed to be getting upset. It kept on shouting one and the same sentence at me, as if it was absolutely furious about something. I was very patient and kept on talking calmly to it for a long time. He ought to be reasonable, with such a brain capacity, such a magnificent brain. I realised then that I was really talking to some kind of a creature, and not just to an isolated set of tissue that functioned. Unconsciously I began imagining a creature with a brain like his.

That was just what he wanted. First the electrical stimulation, and then the constant care—that was not enough. The individual areas of the brain with which he had originally seen, smelt and felt, were anxious to become active; they wanted to have something to do, just like his speculative powers. What he wanted to have once more was a whole organism, with all its senses, and even with its skin.

I should like to emphasise here that it was only after very serious consideration that I decided to go on with the experiment. But there was too much at stake. And my colleagues in the experimental surgery department were only too glad to have the chance to make a human body of their plastics instead of the missing limbs and organs which usually fell to their lot.

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I had no idea what his face ought to be like, of course, and so instead of a face we left him a nice arrangement of bandages, so that he looked like a man recovering from a severe accident.

We returned to the laboratory togeher. He was "happy". He was whistling to himself, a melody that perhaps the poet had known in his lifetime. He stood by the window and looked down at the river flowing near by. It did not occur to him that he ought to start working.

"What a beautiful view," . . . he said. I had never realised it before, because I was always looking into books and never out of the window.

"You may like to know that Professor Smith-Jones . . ." I began tactfully.

"He's miles behind the times," he replied. "He's a fool," and he sat down at the desk. "Book seats for the theatre this evening."

I was rather taken aback. Surely he didn't want to go out with me as well? I inquired about the professor of architecture; He did not like the theatre, it seemed. The poet only went to concerts. We seemed to have given too much importance to Anna Novak's contribution to our invention. By this time, however, many people were following our work with this brain of ours. Especially because it was impossible to follow it. There were learned arguments about whether the responses given by the brain were nonsensical automatic figures, or whether they were the fruit of original and hitherto unknown thought processes being carried on by a human brain raised to the fourth power. Only further experiment could supply the answer. And so I decided that I would go to the theatre with him after all.

He laughed louder and wept more frequently than anybody else in the audience. I enjoyed the play, too. I so rarely went to the theatre in the normal way. I had so much to do in the laboratory. The trouble was that after the play he wanted to come home with me. I had to explain that I was over fifty and that I had a grown-up daughter whose light-hearted way of life I frequently had to criticise, and that I could on no account take a strange man home with me for the night. I used the word "man" on purpose. Of course that made him sad. And he threatened to stop working, because he said he'd nothing left to work for. That was when I first realised that for his work he needed human inducements, the impulse of competing with Smith-Jones, of loving me, of having a family life.

At first my daughter was afraid she'd have to put up with a monster like Frankenstein, the famous monster of silent screen days, but she soon got to like him quite well. It even seemed at times as though

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she got on better with him than with me. She is a funny girl, you see. At first she wanted to work on a lunar station like her father, whom I left soon after our marriage because he had no understanding for my scientific work. Then she wanted to be a dancer, but her hips are too broad for that, in my opinion. Now she is studying Hittite, obviously only so as to avoid studying physics, because she wants to spoil things for me. She's not particularly good at Hittite, while when I was her age I was well-known everywhere. Worst of all, she is expecting a baby by an unknown young man she hasn't even brought home to introduce to me.

My artificial brain seemed to do even less work than my daughter, and in that they certainly had plenty in common. In the course of a day he would write a few lines, and then go for a walk in the park or go bathing in the river. And he kept on explaining to me that I must love my daughter, which is obvious anyway, and that I must be a different person and that work in the laboratory is not a be-all and end-all. The sort of argument you can hear at every street corner nowadays. I didn't need to invent a biological system just to hear that. But he did not reserve this advice for me; he stopped and talked to everybody; the people living in our block of flats began to pass the time of day, respectfully and at a safe distance.

At this period he was dictating responses which were no longer equations at all; they were symbols such as nobody in the world yet understands. Smith-Jones naturally declared it was a pack of nonsense, disconnected and confused scraps of knowledge from his three previous lives. He published his views in a journal. It was like a bombshell. I was sent for by the head of our research institute, journalists tried to interview me, and my experiment became common knowledge. If it did not succeed I should have lost everything.

The super-brain was not a bit worried. That day he barely scribbled three letters.

"What do you want? What are you after now?" I begged him impatiently, and I would even have been willing to sleep with him had it been technically feasible. "You're really blackmailing us . . ." and I put Smith-Jones's article down in front of him.

"I'm not asking for anything," he replied, "except for you to act according to what I tell you . . ." I could not understand him. How could I fit my behaviour to unintelligible symbols and scribbles I myself had begun to lose faith in? "I'll answer in three days," he said and was silent. He gazed out of the window as though he was trying to concentrate on something. I was watching him by means of a special instrument I had installed in

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my own room. He did not write more than two lines the whole night. And except for that he did not move. But he had promised an answer. And so I sent off telegrams to both the professors and informed my superiors. The experiment was drawing to an end.

The next day he did not speak to me at all. He sat in his own room holding his head in his hands and whispering his responses into the dictaphone in a voice that was growing weak. He had gone grey overnight. Can the last phase of knowledge be so exhausting? I did not want to disturb him. The following morning he could no longer recognise me, and by evening his eyes were staring vacantly even at my daughter. I sat by his side all night. His responses were mere hissing sounds by now, and the most delicate dictaphone could not catch them. At three in the morning he "died". At six Professor Smith-Jones arrived. At eight Professor Kozhevkin came. In vain. In time for the funeral.

We had to cremate him, you see. He should have been thrown on the scrap-heap like any other apparatus which is no longer in working order. But in the last few days of his "life" he had made so many friends in the neighbourhood that I could not and would not explain my experiment to every one of them. The Crematorium was packed, and I stood in a corner with the two visiting scientists, who could not refrain from smiling to themselves. How easy it is to deceive our fellow-men. So they would go to a machine's funeral. They recommended that I should repeat the experiment. My daughter was waiting outside the Crematorium. She congratulated me.

"Can't you see that was his answer? He died. And before that he lived, he lived fully and wisely, feeling nothing but affection for those around him. Is not life itself the finest answer, life which we should never cramp and circumscribe? And is not the greatest wisdom of all death after a life lived to the full?"

She introduced her fiancé to me. I realised why she had not done so before. He worked on the same lunar station as my husband had been on, years ago. He was a nice lad. We all went home together. The whole family. A week earlier I would have turned the two of them out. I don't like these fellows from the Moon. I don't know why. I've never really thought about it. I've spent my whole life concentrating my thoughts on my work, like so many other people. Perhaps my daughter is right after all. In its way the disintegration of my biological system could really be an answer. Yet this same answer was given to us at the very beginning of the experiment by the brain of Mrs. Anna Novak. Perhaps we have really neglected

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the art of living too much in recent years. It is an art and not a science. But it calls for the deepest wisdom.

I felt that even a normally intelligent mind could grasp this simple fact.

And so I finally gave up experimenting with biological systems.

Through Time and Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: L

It was Ferdinand Feghoot who, in 2839, averted the greatest fraud in all history. The twin worlds of Gyppo and Pigeon Drop had the highest mutation rate ever known. Their inhabitants provided freaks for the galaxy's sideshows, and specialized in revolting "wild man" acts, swallowing live hair-slugs from Lovecraft 14, and biting the heads off wet, wriggling *slurbwinders*. They were notorious for their rigged games and elaborate confidence tricks.

Then they abruptly "reformed". They joined respectable churches, confessed every detail of their past swindles, and impressed everyone with their fervor. Soon ministers were giving them character references; bankers and lawyers were co-signing their notes.

Feghoot remained unconvinced. Though reviled and ridiculed by the popular press, he pushed his campaign for a thorough investigation by the Galactic Intelligence Agency to a successful conclusion, and the results proved how right he was. The Gypponians and Pigeon Droppers had planned to salt their deserts with priceless *gaborium,* to sell mining stock everywhere, and then to evade prosecution by taking advantage of an obscure immunity clause in the Grand Charter.

"Tell me, how off earth did you know it?" asked the President General, as he hung the supreme decoration around Feghoot's neck.

"It was obvious, sir," answered Ferdinand Feghoot. " 'Beware of geeks baring grifts.' "

—GRENDAL BRIARTON *(with thanks to W. Robert Gibson)*

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You ever hear of a outfit called the Mother Honeywell Foundation of Supernal Light? Don't laugh, it's what I mean serious. . . .

MISS BUTTERMOUTH

by Avram Davidson

NO, NO COFFEE. I *mean* IT. I GIVE it up for the time being. Say, you see this piece in the paper here, doodling and scribbles reveal the unconscious mind? It all ties in with the no-coffee. I *mean* it. Call it a hunch.

What happen? I'll tell you what happen. Couple months ago I was broke, like usual, and I was waiting for a money-order from my brother. The only thing that come was a couple of pamphlets from someone I never heard of. So to kill the morning I go to the library. You ever see a magazine called the Illustrated London Weekly? It's mad, I just read it for chuckles. This time they had a big spread called "Interesting Discoveries In A North Syrian Tomb", or some hot-blooded title like that. All about some old time bigshot name Ebed-Haddad, which they plant him, with a two-wheel cadillac and a couple of hayburners along. So I thought, I'll tell Haddad down at the lunchroom about it—family news from the Old Country, Haddad, from the land of the Sherbert and the shishkabob. But I forget to.

Next day, still no money. I got beans, I got bacon, but no coffee. Then noises coming through the wall give me notice that my neighbor, former Associate Professor Dudley Washburne was at home, so I start to go and join him in a cup of *his coffee.* I bring along the pamphlets since I can't make no sense out of them and maybe he can. You ever hear of a outfit called the Mother Honeywell Foundation of Supernal Light? Don't laugh, it's what I mean serious.

So I take the whole works in to the prof. I tell him, Prof, the good neighbor policy demands you give me a cup of coffee. He says, I never touch the filthy stuff; it rots the striated tissue of the kidney and debilitates the gonads.

Sure. That's the way them professors talk. When he was at the University there was all this giz-

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madoo about swearing oaths, not swearing oaths, and a lot of people figured that was why he lost his job. But the simple truth is he just can not resist breaking the tax stamps on liquor bottles, and once he gets them open, well . . . As for not swearing oaths, you should hear him some night when he's falling over the furniture. But he's all right, though, the Prof.

He poured me out a cup. Brother. After the second one I give him the letter the pamphlets come in and the pamphlets, too, and I ask him, See what you can make out of this, Professor. Well, he moans and says, Have mercy on him, At that hour of the morning, and so on. Then he looks up and says, Surely no one can *really* be named Miss Buttermouth? Anyone with a handwriting like this, he says, could give a course in cryptography.

I tell him to give a look at the pamphlets. What does this here Etaoin Shrdlu mean, I ask him. He says, I can't tell you till you take the higher degrees, he says. It would be a violation of my fraternal oath, he says. *Then* he says, Hel-lo, Hel-lo, What's this? This is pure Ugaritic, he says.

That clicked. That was the name in the limey magazine about this Syrian tomb. I ask him what gives, and he points to this line in the pamphlet right after Etaoin Shrdlu. *This* I *can't* pronounce. I got to write it out for you. Like this here: *Tilt sswm mrkhbt* . . . I tell you, it's nothing to laugh. Listen.

After the Prof finishes shaking his head and pulling his lip and rubbing the back of his head, he tells me something about this Ugaraitic. How its one of them dead languages in the ancient east and they only started digging it up not long ago and very few people know it. Only—he says—this particular line don't fit into the pamphlet at all. What? Of *course* I ask him what does it mean. He says it means, a three horse chariot. Or maybe even. Three horses, one chariot.

Sounds like part of an inventory from a puny form tablet, he says. But what's it doing with the Mother Honeywell malarkey?

Well, like I say, none of this Mother Honeywell Supernal Light Foundation stuff makes any sense, so after I sop up some more coffee I make a polite farewell and took off for Louie's. Where I borrow a scratch sheet and there it is.

The third race. Three horses.

Country's Flag, number one. Absalom, number two. Chariot, number three.

Three horses, one is Chariot! Almost I go wild. Then—very calm—I ask Louis how much of a bet can I put on the cuff. He don't say, This much, and he don't say, That much. He just looks at me like I'm crazy and he says, It's Wednesday. Yeah, yeah, I should

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of remembered Louis don't give no credit on Wednesday, it's his unlucky day. So I sound out everybody else and I tell you I never saw such a bunch of dead wood in my life. I even ran next door to Haddad in the lunchroom and I tell him, Let me take ten: I got a horse with a Syrian name.

He says, What name? He says Chariot? You call that a Syrian name? You trying to kid me? So I start to tell him all about this Ugaritic stuff, but it was absolutely nothing doing. He act as if I'm trying to insult him and he just keeps on saying, All us peoples are Christian peoples. And by the time I get him cooled off I look at the clock and I see it's too late to place a bet.

I go back to Louie's and I ask, Who win in the third? Chariot win in the third, they tell me . . . Naa. Don't ask me what he paid. I'd break into tears if I tell you.

So I go home and I grab them pamphlets and what I mean, I *read* them. It says where they have what they call an illumination every night in the Mother Honeywell Auditorium, so that's where I go and I make it my business to find out who sent me them pamphlets. Who is Miss Buttermouth, I ask. They show me. Who is it but this grey-hair old biddy with a mouth like a rabbit-trap. Her name is really Miss Butter*worth*, but I always think of her the other way.

She just copies names out of the phone book—and get *this*: She writes them pamphlets *herself!*

I tell her what a deep impression they make on me and I walk her home and we stay up half the night talking about the Supernal Light. I get hold of the pamphlet with the—yeah, that one. And I ask her about the, about what I write down for you, you know? She says, Depend on it, it must have a deep and mystical significance, but she can't explain it; when she writes it is just like she's in a trance. All kinds of emenations from the spirit world take control she says. And for some reason the printer claims her handwriting is hard to make out, she says. Then I kind of slide the conversation to see if she knows anything about this Ugaritic, but all she says is, Mother Honeywell has freed us from the dead hand of the past.

So there it is. Like I say, I'm just playing a hunch. I bring her boxes of vegetable nut loaf and jars of yogurt and every night we go for Illumination at the Auditorium. I practically memorize the damn scratch sheet every day just in case she should let drop a name of a horse. But you know what she's starting to talk lately? *Marriage!* She don't believe in passion, though because it dissipates the vital energies, she says.

Meanwhile I dasn't eat no flesh or onions or use strong drink, to-

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bacco or coffee. That's what she says: *Or coffee.* All them things dissipates the vital energies, she says. Sooner or later my hunch will pay off and I'll clean up, I tell you, I'll clean up.

But I don't know how long I can hold out. I just don't know.

The Mermaid in the Swimming Pool

By fleshlight and tileglow,
In a wishwashed terrain
Of civilized waves,
She swims through my brain.

With the flick of her smile
And the flail of her frown,
She wakes wet echoes
Where coral scruples drown

And I hear her calling music
From the harps of her hair
Vibrate through the depths
Of gillshaken air

And the song combs my blood
On the sands of my wrist
And clouds my tall eye
With a mythical mist

And my craft wrecks on charts
That are older than reefs.
By skinlight and caveglow
And pulsedark beliefs

And tied to the mast
Of my fear, I regale,
By scalesight and sandfall,
That terrible tail.

—Walter H. Kerr

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"Give us some information of a biographical nature on Mr. Burger's story, which we have just bought with pleasure," we demanded of the Kindly Editor, from whom we had recently Taken Over. "It isn't Mr. *Burger, it's* Mrs. *Burger," he said. "Ask her." We did. "As for autobiographical material," she replied; "Um." And continued, "Studied zoology, sculpture, English, in four colleges, incl. Bennington and Cornell. Husband is an editor and writer; we have two daughters, twelve and ten, an old house in the West Village, and a changeable menagerie of found animals. Have published a book, stories, several poems, and (mostly) book reviews. Began reading science fiction in 1941, but only recently started writing it. Work mostly at night, and most of the stories began as dreams, which I try to transcribe exactly as dreamed. Next to poetry, I find science fiction a good, terse and un-ordinarily-limited way of saying what one means . . . I hope to have some other stories along soon." We are sure that, having read this fine story, you will hope so, too.*

LOVE CHILD

by Otis Kidwell Burger

How I distrust words! They hurry down my page, isolated epitaphs on tombstones, each burying a once-live thought; the fleeting reality of a personal history smothered, at each encounter, by the older dark dignity of Mankind's tongues. Why is it so rarely possible to speak without editing, translating?

It is my job to translate, French books for an American press, in Paris. And sometimes, in the midst of my mechanical decoding, rarely and suddenly transfixed by some phrase, some fragment from another's consciousness upthrust into my own, I rise and pace my booklined study, hearing the sounds of spring, Paris, the chil-

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dren playing, ticking away outside, like clocks. What are words? The most meaningful part of life are these apparently aimless moments. Not work, or words, but boredom, laughter, drunken nights, accidents, shape our lives. For in these unguarded moments, the dark pressure within bubbles a little closer to the surface, to be heard at last, known without conscious knowing, by the unsleeping inner ear.

So the most guarded of us know ourselves only in dreams; and some, only in broken dreams. As a glass, smashed in some dark corner, will often leave shards that pierce one's foot days, months, later . . .

It was spring in Paris; pink horse chestnuts in bloom, nursemaids and children with sailboats in the parks; children playing skipping games behind Notre Dame. The shop girls in tight skirts, the flower stalls, bookstalls, Seine water, the yellowed old stones themselves, all burnished and alight in the sun of another season.

All five of the children were living in my apartment at that point: my two, Denise and Delia, and Gerard's Debbie, Robert, and the baby, Melissa. My American husband, Paul, was away on a business trip, as usual; and Gerard's French wife, Miranda, in the hospital after an auto accident.

It is no accident that Gerard's children, and mine, are named so French-American, and alike. We are cousins, he and I, and grew up together. When his French father died, and his mother, my mother's sister, began her last long journey from one TB sanitarium to another, the child Gerard came to live with us, in the family house near Gramercy Park. We were a year apart, both only children, both dark, shy, awkward with other children and secretive with adults; and our first-look recognition of each other, beneath all the barriers of language and childhood, was instantaneous; startling as the encounter of one's image in an unexpected mirror. For ten years, we ate, played, talked with each other; sole children in a dark houseful of adults; wary and shy as foxes. Except with each other. And the green park that reminded him so of Paris, and home, slipped inside us both, a shared secret jungle, that grew to overshadow both our adult lives.

So that though we did not marry, due to a childish quarrel or misunderstanding, when Paul's business brought us to Paris years later, I did not, did not need to, look up Gerard. We met simply, accidentally, as I'd expected, in a park again, at a Punch and Judy show; he over his two children (Melissa was not then born), I over mine. A long quiet turning appraisal. And nothing to be said.

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As Gerard had taught me French, so it was he that got me the job translating. Not so much to relieve my loneliness, whether Paul was away or not. Not for an excuse to see me, though the authors and publishers that eventually leavened Paul's dull business parties made it easier to meet Gerard, and Miranda too, on a social level; but that he and I both knew, I think, that healing lies in accepting, turning to use, one's splits.

And yet in those years, wrestling with words, there were times I cursed his wisdom. How long must one pay penance, face to face with one's fatal gift and fault. Or sense another presence, wise, untouchable, walking in and out of the rebellious thickets of words and heart . . . Well, we all suffer for what we are. I was glad for the other people he brought into that house, who spoke some of the double language I knew; and for being able to touch, if not with him, his Paris, his world.

It grew easier, in time. The real imaginary playmate merged into the simpler present; shared friends; and our children, visiting and playing together, as he and I had once done.

So that when Miranda lay mending her bones in the hospital, it seemed only natural, another curious evolution of the past, that Gerard's children should come to stay with me. Yet it was difficult. Both Gerard and Miranda had a streak of wildness in them; on holidays, they broke bones skiing, hunting; they became involved with odd people; there were wild parties, and auto accidents. And it was rumored she had cracked up, that last time, driving too fast after a quarrel. Their children, too, were wilder than mine. Dark, like myself and Gerard, and apt to mischief.

They came with a Negro maid, like our old Nurse, whom Gerard had hired to take Melissa to the park while the elder children were in school; but nevertheless my routine was much upset. It is difficult to sit over the typewriter all day, translating another's ideas, and in the afternoons and evenings, be mother and arbiter to a translated dream of one's own.

And mine, being American children, had also the stranger's wild sense of privilege and rule-breaking which Gerard's children, alas, only augmented. So that if, like proper French children, they often started off to the park, properly white-gloved and in file, on an afternoon, they often escaped from Selma, to return draggled, riotous, as impossible to subdue as laughing savages (or dreams themselves).

Sitting over the supper table, with Gerard's children and mine newly washed, aligned finally, properly, on opposite sides of the table as they should be, as life had

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decreed; or putting them to bed at night; I arbitrated strange wars. What had joined one generation lay dissonant between the next. Five warm little bodies clung to me at night; but fended off me, each other, by day. As I, them.

As if children are aspects of memory, each holding some seed of past, to blossom in different future. . .

It was on one such spring afternoon that the children came back from the Park, as usual, wild; I heard Nanny Selma fussing over them, washing up. And then the silence as they were put into the playroom for the hour before supper. I listened from, and went back to, my typewriter. But some quality of silence from the playroom (how any change of tempo from an accepted rhythm can derange!) disturbed me. I went down the hall, opened the door, and first saw Binky.

He was sitting in the middle of them; the center, the reason of, silence. Not so big as Robert, but more compact, as small people grow into, rearrange themselves into maturity in a smaller scale; not yet ten, perhaps, and blonde like my bigger, more blooming children, but with something wise and already set about him. Eyes dark and sad as Gerard's. His clothes, too, were enigmatic, of no time or place; long grey trousers, a jacket, and a Fauntleroy flowing bowtie.

I stared. He, more polite, did not. After a moment, Denise saw fit to introduce him.

"This is Binky. We found him in the Park this afternoon."

"Very well." One is always polite to found playmates. "But it is nearly supper-time. Remind him when it is time to go home."

Debbie and Delia explained immediately that Binky was lost, could not go home, and that (therefore) this home was his. Their reasons enlarged chiefly on their reasons for so believing; Robert remained quiet. Binky and Melissa played with the blocks.

(Play! Out of my eye's corner I saw suddenly. With two colors of blocks, and not many of those, he created landscapes; de Chirico hollow worlds, Piranesi tormented labyrinths. Three blocks and an arch for a haunted building, and a no-color block stranded outside it, alone with its shadow.) Melissa sat by him, criticising without words. He nodded, obeyed. But when he saw I was about to address him directly, he swept all his private worlds away, and sat quietly to listen.

"But surely your parents must be worried." No response, except the grey flicker in his eyes. I tried French, without success. Then my phrase-book Italian. Then a few words of German. This exhausted my vocabularies, except the one I was afraid to use.

Melissa explained, in piping

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French, that his parents were out and would not begin to worry until later, and perhaps Binky should have supper with the others.

So I (as one does when at a loss with children) sent them all into the bathroom to wash up again. And a moment later, hearing exclamations of delight and wonder, opened the door. I had a distinct impression that the bathroom had sprouted fountains; not as children create fountains by thumb-pressing a faucet, but simply that there *were* fountains, as Tivoli has fountains, as some ancient mental connection with the idea of water creates fountains, with fauns and nymphs, green-grass and trees, around and about. More of Binky's landscapes, no doubt. Shaken, I closed the door.

And presently he came out amidst them, as immaculate and smiling as he had gone in, and we all sat down at the candle-lit dinner table, in the dusk, over our cut fruit; Binky in the place-of-honor on my right, and Robert, for once, in Paul's empty seat at the head of the table.

(Names, places; what power they have over us. Did I marry a blonde American for his near-French name? And whose rightful place was Gerard's dark ten-year-old, with his almost American name, filling?) I closed my eyes over grace, trying to see not the children, but the archtypal images behind them; the loves and needs and misdirections that had produced that moment.

And opened them to Binky, politely passing me the bread.

How self-possessed, curiously pale, calm, and silent, Binky sat through that meal. Unchildlike. And as ghostly-white as the overripe peonies in the table's center. While Robert, who had inherited all Miranda's taut dislike and impatience for people, secrets she did not understand, glowered at us from the other end.

(Chic, with a Frenchwoman's worldliness and possession, she had once tried to make me her confidante 'as Gerard's almost sister'; feeling me out, putting me in place, with the refined cruelty and curiosity of a child; and for that moment, I hated her. One does not share secrets learned from the same, but forbidden, source.)

Binky's stillness shone eery by contrast. He seemed not so much to eat his food, as to absorb it; as though he'd done away with the mechanics of knife-fork-teeth-palate. Or as though food, like other people's thoughts, merely flowed into him, and he grew and ate invisibly.

So that when, at the meal's end, I resumed finally the subject of his parents, I was not wholly surprised when he replied, in perfect English,

"My parents will find me, when they are ready for me. They always do."

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"So you do speak English."

He gave me that odd, still-center look of his, and nodded. I have seen no children, and few adults, capable of radiating that sense of being the middle-connection of an infinite number of power lines; as if the restless waiting in which most of us spend our lives had been, in him, translated into an acute knowledge of being the emptied focus of other people's waiting. Through which, all other powers must pass on their way to being.

Later, in the playroom, I overheard him speaking flawless French to the other children. Children learn other languages, slip between them, forget them, more quickly than adults. But when Selma came in to shoo them out, saying,

"Now you-all, go out in the yard awhile, whiles I tidy up," and Binky answered, in the same Southern lilt, I remembered that he'd caught, too, not only my language but my tone; and not only the children's French, but their pidgen-quick, shrill accents. Too quickly for ordinary mimicry. As if it were the tone of mind itself he'd caught, and merely spilled over into the appropriate language.

Well, mimicry, and the tone-reading of human beings, is the child's genius; the adult's failing is in reading larger meanings into such things. Past the middle of our lives, we look for signs and portents in others' most ordinary insights; as if habit, the encroaching dark, the walls we build between ourselves and the essential mystery and complexity of being could be broken back into again if only we had a child's clarity, or some other key . . . lost; what is it we lose? Binky knew.

As some beings can slip under all languages.

But as I stood in the empty, dusk and flower-filled apartment, trying to explain him to myself, listening to Selma tidying in the playroom, and watching the children evolving some new game in the courtyard two stories below. I felt I had less and less of the key.

Myself alive. Two arms, two legs, and a head to move them. And a mystery in between. The body that had begotten two children, a machine unknown; as secret in its uses as all mind's undercurrents. One's limbs, like cranes, reach out and move a fragment of world; and one's image of oneself, and a slim bundle of mechanical mental talents, moves them. It is not as simple as it is for children, who move all of a piece. Or as it is for a Binky, who know all others' reasons for moving.

But past acts leave a small shadow, an ineradicable stain that works into the fabric of our being.

If (as the wind blew the long curtains in the window) Gerard's

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mistresses, his and Miranda's accidents, were because of me? I knew, and did not wish to know. She had him; I did not; and past a certain point, there is no use in untangling, or in being saint, or overseer, of others' lives. That was done.

We had been good hosts to parties and children, Paul and I. Better than Gerard and Miranda. Nor can one despise a bedmate, someone known in its fairest and frailest moments; all people have complex rights, devolving from the very fact of their existence.

But what (as the dusk settled over the lovely city, into the corners of the apartment), what, in middle age, as one's powers of taboos wrinkle over into the long wait for death, is taboo any longer? Our understanding alters, as we grow older. The walls close; and the dragons come back. And we no longer have teeth, reason, to defend ourselves. In the approaching dark, all cats are grey. All weakness, carried long enough, a possible strength.

What barriers between us had Gerard and I not crossed already, in our minds?

So I stood, still, inward, when Gerard came into the darkened apartment and stood beside me at the window.

"Miranda is better today. She threatens to be out soon, and wonders what you are doing with the children." He stood apart, with no greeting. The tone and scent of his tiredness filled the room. Below us, in the courtyard, the children trotted on mysterious errands. "I see they have found a new playmate."

"Or Binky has found them." I stood, silent, near the window.

No, it had not been a childish quarrel. He had been just 21; back in Paris, having inherited his dead mother's house. And I, 20. My mother, knowing, had brought me there to see him, and other relatives. But the strangeness of place, of a year's separation, of a whole childhood's relation . . . oh; seeing him there, stripped of the safeness of childhood, I had seen the whole shock of him; ourselves new, adult; the taboo of cousin-marriage and incest, heightened in us, so long together. To touch self in another? Hold life, knowledge, that close? So, young, frightened, I had quarreled with him, and gone home. A year later, he married. And I, lost, married too.

"A strange friend," Gerard said, noticing how the curtains shook under my hand, remembering.

"Binky? Yes. I have noticed him all these . . . all afternoon. He is a stray. He ate with us, and was most polite and . . . Oh, Gerard. Why is it some people remind us so profoundly of something familiar, and forgotten? That's Binky's talent. And I must find his parents, get him home before nightfall."

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"He is lost?"

"I don't know. He doesn't, or won't, remember where he came from. So how in hell (Paul's phrase; as though I were invoking some god of law and order) can I get him home? The police, perhaps."

Had my face whitened? He dropped his eyes to his toes. "What is it you fear in him?"

"His strangeness. He is like . . . a child from another planet. Do you believe in such things?"

"No." He sighed, and after moment added in a low voice, to himself, "There is enough magic and strangeness in people, without invoking outside powers. Love, birth, death . . . these human magics may seem mere tricks, if explained, yet still leave residues of question. Why should we be so eternally desirous of being fooled by lesser magics? We know what we know by private dictionaries; but just these primal emotions are what people want translated away . . ."

"Gerard . . ."

"No." He put up to me, first that thin-boned dark hand, with its brush of black hair just below each knuckle; then the dark, too-fine face, all skull and fur; and the big, gentle eyes. Gerard. He is a human stripped to essence. Skin, fur, eye; and mind. To meet him, eye to eye, is to feel the full shock of bareness. As, to see Binky is to sense complexity. "No," said Gerard, stopping short of touching me. "Look, Melissa."

(Have I said, the name of his youngest was his childhood private name for me? We had avoided knowing it, till then, he and I), and I looked.

The court was bare, except for a stone lion, and some plantings of flowers, and three linden trees, which were then blossoming.

And, as the children ran now, in some game, Binky hesitated; and then, plucking a stone from one of the flower-bed edgings, carried it with him as he ran, as a diver carried a weight, lest he float to the water's surface. In the twilight, his cropped blonde head, his seriousness, shone like a strange star.

And now the children lined up, 12345, palings on an eternally dividing fence.

"No, look," Gerard's hand clamped on my arm. "Not from another planet. From a dream. Whose dream, Melissa?"

Now the children were jumping the stone lion, challenging Binky. Even at that distance, I saw the excited fright in them. Like that of children left out too late, at a party, in a strange city. No . . . the furious gleeful fright of children challenging one another, and one special one, to some shameful, miraculous display of weakness, by which the others will finally regain a lost mastery. Or find something new.

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And Binky, serious, stood a moment. And put down his stone. He looked round at them. And then, quite gravely, and intent, lifted his arms and flew over the stone lion. And then turned and, less self-consciously, lifted himself like a diver in the quiet dark air, and flew back again.

Standing again, on the far side, he waited for them to judge him. And, after a moment's conference together, they applauded him cautiously. And looked at him again. For more.

This time, after some thought, he raised the lion a foot or two; and, thinking better of it, put it back, and quickly raised Melissa. Overjoyed, she spread her arms like a Christmas card cherub; sailed for a moment among linden blossoms falling like snow; and came back to earth breathless, rosy.

Now the others begged a turn; all save Robert, who stood apart, dark, sullen. Debbie went up; then my two, less high, less gracefully. Then, with a quick disclaiming gesture, Binky brought them to earth and left himself at their command.

I could see the next game begin, in their whispered conference; it would be a summoning. And yes, now, while Gerard's thin hand tightened like a vise on my black sleeve, my flesh, my bone, the creatures came out of the shadowy wood of three trees below. Rabbit, squirrel, fox; and, as their imaginations grew bolder, a peacock, in full display. A deer, dappled, full-crowned. A vast elephant. A striped tiger. All pacing, shadowy, visible, across the flat-hewn flagstones, to disappear in shadow as they touched the spiky black fence that separated courtyard from narrow street beyond.

And now . . . .

"No," Gerard said. "No, no, now you must stop them, Melissa. Now it must not . . ." He flung back the window; the shattered glass struck the flagstones in an explosion, like hail; and the dim terrible shape that had been gathering behind the flowering trees, hesitated, and reabsorbed itself quietly.

And Binky, with a last quiet glance up at us, walked very slowly across the stone courtyard and also passed, like his creations, through the palings of the fence, and melted into all the roads beyond.

Gerard shut the curtains with a furious shudder.

"But why. . . ?"

"Selma," he shouted. "Selma, bring the children in." The roar of his voice, for once, filled the apartment.

"But why. . . ?"

"Because." He turned, still wrenched with fury. "What do children, and dreams, reach out for past wish? And this was not a child's dream. Nightmare. Horror, Melissa; chaos, death lust, the

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archetypal figures we all carry deep even under the sweet half-layer desires of flight, escape. Do you want them all eaten up, Melissa? The children that stand between me and you?"

"No, no, What are you talking of?"

"Don't you know who Binky is, was?"

"No, no . . ." He had been shaking me, as a terrier shakes a rat, or a nightmare the dreamer. Now I fell, spent, against my half of the curtains. "No, Gerard." Seeing still, in my mind's eye, that small, central figure, resigned, all-knowing, and regretful, walk off-stage into the dusk. "No, Gerard. Who was Binky, then?"

He left me abruptly; turned into the darkness of the room, where I could not see him. And over the shrill sounds of the children, scrambling up the stair, and Selma's low voice, scolding them; his voice, cracked with compassion and a terrible sorrow, said, from shadow, "Your child and mine, Melissa. Didn't you know him?"

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Why Ron Goulart fan-clubs have not sprung up in every corner of the English-speaking world must be a matter of concern to all who relish the dry and subtle flavor (or do we mean bouquet? *No matter) of this young California advertising man's prose. Here the creator of Max, the Occult Investigator, takes us (if not Max) to Osbert Planet, whose age-old system of government includes the High Officials Community Brass Band,* two *Junior Prime Ministers, a Minister of Cafeterias, an elected Princess who must have either great political wisdom or be able to play some musical instrument, and detective V. M. Hickens—famous solver of snake cases—whose son is an Irish tenor in a Venusain joss house.*

PRINCESS #22

by Ron Goulart

THE TRAIN STOPPED. BERT Sickles fell off the large packing case and crashed into a wicker hamper. He stayed on his knees and looked toward the small high window of the baggage car. Working out his hand blaster he crawled back to the case he was escorting to the capital. Outside there was more shooting, the fizzle of heavy blasters, angry yelling.

Maybe now he'd meet somebody interesting. There might be a chance to bump into some of the first class passengers if this was a full scale bandit raid. There was never much opportunity to meet anyone worthwhile traveling in the baggage coach.

A wild shot came through the window and plunked into the ceiling. Bert got down behind the Biz Enterprise crate. He didn't think it was good publicity to carry the star of your show around in a crate, but BE knew best. Bert hoped the shooting wouldn't do any damage to the facrobot packed in there in all that excelsior.

The yelling was louder and closer. Bert pressed down nearer to the floor. This wasn't the kind of

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excitement he'd been hoping for. Three and a half months now he'd been traveling across Osbert, setting up one night stands for the entertainment android. So far there had been no celebrities, no people of any real worth at all to meet. Bert was traveling with a reasonable facsimile of Donna Dayton, the famous Mars torch singer of a few years back. Donna Dayton herself was a nobody now, but fac-copy #22 still did okay out in the remoter planets. This was not what Bert had expected when he left his uncle's telekinesis plant and come to work for Biz Enterprises.

Bert had to admit that he was still only on the fringes of real show business. Now he was involved with the yokel stuff like androids and stereops. Someday he'd be working one of the nine major planets, meeting the right kind of people. The train started up again and Bert shot the handles off the wicker hamper.

"Easy with that thing. If you set the excelsior on fire we'll be in real trouble," said Donna Dayton.

Bert looked at the blaster, then at the black metal suitcase that held the Donna Dayton tapes. You put one in the back of the android and pushed a button to make it sing and talk. He hadn't done that. "Beg pardon?"

"Put that gun away and we'll talk. The trouble's over outside."

Bert dropped the gun and sat down hard on the case. "Don't get excited now, Miss Dayton."

"You hardware men are all jumpy," said a girl's voice behind him.

Bert turned. "I was just running through my new act, miss." He didn't know how long she'd been standing there. He was certain Donna Dayton had spoken to him, but he didn't want to have it discussed.

"Not much of an act. You and a wooden box." The girl was a slim brunette.

"That's what they said on the big planets. So I'm out here on Osbert. What was the trouble by the way?"

Coming further into the baggage car the girl said, "Some ousted minister from Monarchy Hill in the capital. He was staging a protest meeting. He staged it right on the tracks and it slowed the train up."

"Anybody hurt?"

"Nobody was a good enough shot for that."

"Oh," said Bert. "Well nice to have met you."

The girl put her hands on her hips and frowned at him. "My name's Jan Nordlin and I'm in show business. *Live* show business. I came back here to see if my stuff was all right."

Bert nodded. He didn't recognize her face. She couldn't be anyone very successful.

"I'm a ventriloquist and if

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there's one thing I hate it's those walking nickelodeons."

Bert narrowed one eye. "You mean my entertainment android, Donna Dayton #22?"

"That's the one. I saw your lousy act in the last territory." Jan shook her head and walked over to the crate.

"And I guess I saw your ventriloquist act just now."

"Sure," said Jan. "I can throw my voice any place. And you made me mad with your clumsiness. Nearly burning my hampers."

Bert knew enough about the biz to know live talent in the ventriloquism line never got very far. He decided to cut this short. "Check for damages and if there's anything needed bill Biz Enterprises." He turned to go.

"Wait till I check the dummies." Jan pulled open one of the wicker hampers and poked around inside. After she had done the same to the second crate she said, "The little fellows are okay."

"That's fine. Well, goodbye."

"I'm going to the capital to join a traveling show."

"I see."

"Are you going there?"

"Yes." The android was set to play two nights at the biggest automatic cafeteria in the capital. Some worthwhile people might be in the audience, royalty even.

"Why are you with BE selling this scrap metal entertainment?"

Bert watched the girl for a moment. "I guess I'm stagestruck."

"You have any talent yourself?"

"Nope," said Bert. "I just like to be around important kinds of people. Show folks and all. Oh, when I was a kid I did impersonations at parties."

"Did you impersonate people? Or machines?" asked Jan. "You seem to love this junk." She wacked the top of the android's case.

The android started singing.

Bert said, "Is that you?"

"No," said Jan over the singing. She moved back from the crate as he approached it.

"I guess I left a song tape in again. That's sloppy."

Jan watched Bert get his tool kit from among the piled baggage. "It's a catchy song, though."

Bert grunted and got out a crowbar. He rolled up his sleeves and pried the lid off in under ten minutes.

"That's better," said Jan as the lid came off. "I can hear much better now."

"Let's everybody shut up," said Bert, shoving his arms down into the bright yellow excelsior. The android was lying on its back and Bert had to reach around behind and switch off the tape. "There."

"How many of those things did you say there were?"

"Facs? Couple or three dozen I guess. Donna Dayton became popular on the big planets nearly ten years ago. There may have been

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even more in circulation then. A few even got out to planets like this."

"I know." Jan began gathering her suitcases together. "Ever meet the real Donna Dayton?"

"No. She's a hasbeen now. Except for residuals from these things," said Bert.

"Where are you staying in the capital?"

"Biz Enterprises made the arrangements." Jan Nordlin was attractive, but Bert was determined not to waste his time on non-established personalities.

"Didn't they bother to tell you where they made the arrangements?"

"The Osbert Hawaiian I think."

"Right near Monarchy Hill."

Bert smiled. "Near the ruling families you mean?"

"Sure. On a clear day you can probably see right up to the top of the hill, to where Princess Louise herself hangs out."

"A real princess," said Bert. That would be some one worth meeting.

"I'll be at the Downtown Center Hotel. Look me up if you can."

"I have to arrange things," said Bert. "And get her to the hotel and all."

"Well, try." Jan smiled. "I just noticed, the train's stopping. We're there."

There was a final jerk and the baggage coach was still. "I may see you then."

"We can head for town together if you want to."

There was some kind of loud music coming close outside. The door of the car opened and a round red-cheeked man in a bright uniform came in with a saxophone under his arm. "Like the music?" he asked.

"Yes," said Bert. "Did you want an audition or something?"

The man laughed. "We've come to welcome you. That's the High Officials Community Brass Band."

"To welcome me?" This hadn't happened before anyplace. Usually he even had trouble finding someone to help him carry the android.

"If you're Bert Sickles who is presenting Donna Dayton you're the one." The man caught Bert's arm. "Come on. Some of the boys want you to ride on their shoulders."

Bert shrugged at Jan. "You'll have to go on without me. Sorry."

"Don't be. Goodbye." Jan smiled, gathered up her hampers and walked out.

"Oh," said the bandman. "That's not Donna Dayton?"

"No. She's in the crate."

"Hear there was a little trouble enroute. She make it okay?"

"Shipshape."

"Some people wanted to know." He pushed Bert ahead of him. "Welcome to the capital."

Bert smiled. This was more what he had in mind.

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The Junior Prime Minister laughed apologetically. "It's the incline," he said to Bert.

"I see, Mr. Provle."

The other Junior Prime Minister, Hankit, got out of the official car. "Fix it in a minute."

Bert cleared his throat. "It's nice of you to invite me to a Command Performance."

Provle ran his thumb against the grain of his shadow of a beard and smiled again. "It livens things up."

"I'm surprised that you've heard of us out here."

"Your advance publicity was effective." Provle leaned forward and watched Hankit bend into the mechanism under the hood. "Your android is in good condition after the long journey?"

"She's packed in excelsior. She's fine. About how much time do we have to fill at the Command Performance?"

Hankit pulled himself back out and shook his head at them.

"What?" asked Provle, sliding across the seat.

"Who else is on the bill? How long will our turn be?"

"Nobody else on, just you."

Bert grinned. This was certainly flattering.

Provle joined Hankit in the dusk and they both stood looking into the engine.

Bert let himself relax for a moment. Below them were the first three circles of low fort-like houses that made up Monarchy Hill. Four more rings of houses had to be passed through before they reached the top and the palace. "Let me have a look," said Bert, getting out of the official car. He'd had to patch up the Donna Dayton android a few times and so he knew a little something about machines.

Headlights brushed them. A big yellow van was coming down hill, horn honking. It wouldn't be able to pass.

The van stopped a few feet short of the car and the driver, a middle-aged man in a gold braided uniform leaned out of the cab. "Is this some further indignity?"

"Good evening, minister," said Hankit. "Our car is in trouble."

"The Minister of Cafeterias," whispered Provle to Bert.

"I am no longer a minister," said the uniformed man. "I've been kicked downhill. Down to level 2."

"Level 2?" said Hankit. He sighed and shook his head.

"I'll be stuck in Education, as Secretary of Chalk and Erasers. Now don't hold me up. The new minister has to be moved into my old house by lunchtime tomorrow. There's an important cabinet barbecue coming up."

"We really can't give you the right of way," said Provle. "We outrank you now."

The ex-minister jumped down to the road and came over to them.

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"That the engine in there?"

"Yes," said Hankit, stepping aside.

"You don't keep it very clean. I'll give it a good smack with something."

"Wait," said Provle. "Are you certain that's the thing to do?"

"You may not know that I once served the Transportation Office as Under-Chairman of Blowouts. I know a thing or two. I have a big heavy pipe in my van. I'll get it."

Hankit shifted from foot to foot, clapping his hands together. "We're going to be late." He looked up at the top of the car, where the android's crate was strapped. "This won't harm the robot I hope."

"She's packed in excelsior," said Bert.

A new honking started behind them. Grinding up the road was a black van. It stopped a yard back of their car and a black-uniformed driver dropped out. "You'll have to make way for the new Minister of Cafeterias."

The old minister was back with a large metal pipe in his hand. "Another indignity?"

The new minister himself, a thin young man with a fine crew-cut, stepped from the black van. "You know very well that uniform goes with the job. Why are you using it for coveralls?"

"My suit's at the cleaners."

"I'm afraid I'll have to issue an order for you to remove it."

"This is what I get for being a nice person and leaving the hall runner behind for you."

"I have an important barbecue to attend in the morning and I can't go to it wearing a shabby hall rug. Now give me the uniform."

"Shabby, is it?"

Clapping his hands faster, Hankit began to bounce up and down. "We'll have to go on on foot."

"Agreed," said Provle, moving to unfasten the crate. "Can you carry this yourself, Mr. Sickles?"

"Not with two suitcases."

"I'll take one end then and we'll put the suitcases on top."

Hankit hesitated and then handed the car keys to the upcoming minister. "Do what you want with the car after you get your differences settled."

"Out of the way. I need room to swing this pipe," said the old minister.

As they hefted the case up hill Bert said, "I hope we won't be late for the show."

"What show?" said Hankit, who was walking beside him.

"The Command Performance."

"That show. No, there's no hurry." He reached out and patted the crate.

The Prime Minister dropped his cloak over a heavy straight chair and strode to the great stone fireplace. "They ought to put some

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wood in this. I'm Walter Barnaby." His strong chin shot out once.

"They told me you were coming," said Bert.

"You're no doubt tired after your flight."

"I came by train."

"No wonder you're tired." Barnaby circled the room slowly his eyes half closed. "You ought to take a long rest."

"I usually can't get much rest before a show."

"What show?" Barnaby's chin twitched again.

"The Command Performance."

"Princess Louise is feeling poorly. The show may be postponed a week or more."

"I've got a series of shows and concerts to put on here."

"They've already been postponed."

"Well, I should let Biz Enterprises know."

"They know," Barnaby said. He got down on his hands and knees. "There. I thought so."

"More comfortable on all fours?"

"The crate's under the bed. I hadn't seen it anywhere."

"I thought it would be safe there."

Barnaby stood up. "It's probably damp under there. That's the last place I'd put an android of mine." He snapped his fingers. "I know of a warm dry place."

"Do they serve drinks there?"

"A place to store the android." The prime minister knelt again, tugging at the crate.

"I can't let it out of my sight, sir. That's in my contract with BE. I even have to ride in the baggage coach with it."

"We'll let you come in and look at it now and then." Barnaby pulled the crate completely out from under Bert's bed.

"Look," said Bert. "What kind of monarchy is this? I'm impressed by meeting prime ministers and all, but I had hoped to shake hands with the princess herself. Not only don't I meet her, I have to sit here a week and do nothing. Maybe I should just take my android and go on about my business." Bert stopped. He hadn't intended to speak so strongly to someone of the Prime Minister's station.

"You like princesses, do you?"

"As a class, yes. They have a certain status that one can respect."

Barnaby smiled, his head bobbing. "I feel I can trust a man with your beliefs."

"You can."

"Princess Louise has been abducted. Three days ago while she was cutting the ribbon that opened a new downtown cafeteria."

"Carried off?"

"At high noon." Barnaby spread his hands. "What is worse she must appear at the preliminary judging of ladies in waiting a week hence."

"A week hence. Who took her?"

"We suspect a man named

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Ward Rhymer. An opportunist from the south."

"Why'd he do it?"

"I don't know if you know how our age-old system of government works," said Barnaby. "I'll explain. Each year we hold a contest to select the prettiest girl in each town. This girl must be more than just a likeable beauty. She must have either great political wisdom or be able to play some musical instrument. From these girls the princess who rules all the territory is picked. The finals are held right here on Monarchy Hill."

"Sounds like as good a system as any," said Bert, sitting down on the crate.

"Careful of that," said Barnaby. "I think you will get some idea of Princess Louise's intense personal charm and accordian playing ability when I tell you that she has won the contest five years in a row."

"I'd like to meet her."

Barnaby winked. "I'll show you her picture." From a pocket deep inside his coat he drew out a small gold-framed oval picture. "There she is."

Bert shook his head. "That's not Princess Louise. That's Donna Dayton."

"Exactly," said Barnaby, laughing. "By the kind of divine coincidence that happens rarely your android and our princess are lookalikes."

"It's pretty incredible."

"If your android were to appear at the judging no one would know. Any attempt to discredit her for not appearing would fail."

"Wouldn't it be simpler to find the real Princess Louise and bring her back by next week?"

"We have put the case in the hands of a highly recommended operative and tracker. However, it's very essential that Princess Louise make an appearance next week. Should our search fail, we'll need your android."

"You've only got one guy out looking?"

"There is need for a certain amount of delicacy."

Bert got his suitcase out of the closet and unpacked his tool kit. "If you think it'll help you're welcome to Donna Dayton #22. See that she doesn't get banged up too much."

"We don't foresee any assassination attempts." Rubbing his palms along his legs Barnaby, smiling, watched Bert uncase the android.

Yellow excelsior spurted out onto the thick rug. "Look like the princess to you?"

Barnaby laughed. "Exactly."

"Will it fool people?"

"I'm certain. We have, fortunately, many recordings of the princess' lovely speeches and proclamations. We can edit them into something suitable for her to say at the judging." Barnaby bent to help Bert brush off the android.

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"This does have a place for inserting tapes?"

"Up to three hours. Want me to show you how to work the control box?"

"Robotics is a hobby of mine," said Barnaby. "It's not all politics with prime ministers. I can operate the machine I know."

Bert propped the Donna Dayton android up in a straight chair. If the princess looked like this, she must be pretty good. A tall, suntanned blonde. "Say, sir."

"Yes?"

"I wonder if, while you're setting up this impersonation, I might help look for the princess." It would be a great chance to meet some royalty.

"Well," said Barnaby," we might have need for you here on The Hill."

"I might even find her."

Reaching out and arranging the android in the chair Barnaby said, "Very well. Go look up our operative in the morning and see if you can lend him a hand." Barnaby hurried over and took his cloak. "I have some sample speech tapes in my chambers. Would it be keeping you up if I brought them in and tried them out?"

"No, sir," said Bert, anxious to hear the princess' voice.

Barnaby bowed and ran out.

From the window Bert could see the rings of lights that circled around the hill. He took a deep breath. There was something pleasant about being at the top of things.

Bert Sickles crossed the dirt road, gritting his teeth in the cold early morning air.

The automatic cafeteria was nearly empty. "Good morning," said the turnstile as Bert pushed through it.

Something had gone wrong with the cruller dispensers and they were shooting crullers in lopsided arcs across the width of the place.

"Catch one and join me," said a small weathered man in a secondhand brown overcoat. He edged his chair to one side and motioned Bert to sit next to him.

"No thanks. I'm meeting someone." The crullers were coming by at shoulder level and Bert decided to sit down till the machines fixed themselves.

"Nothing's going right this morning," said the man. He had a nose that was nearly round. Polishing it with his thumb, he said, "The griddle cake machine made one three and one half feet in diameter. It scared the hell out of the syrup dispenser. The cold weather does it. My name's H. M. Vickens."

"Pleased to meet you." Bert stood up after one last cruller sailed over. He sat down suddenly. "What did you say?"

"Griddle cake with a diameter of three and a half feet."

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"I mean your name. You're Vickens?"

"The same."

"You don't have a son who's a confidential investigator?"

"My son's an Irish tenor in a Venusian joss house. If you're Sickles let's get going."

"The Prime Minister told you about me," said Bert. "I'd like to help bring back Princess Louise."

"Can you drive a truck?"

"Sure."

"I brought a war surplus half-track and I can't get the thing to run right. Come on." Vickens took an orange knit cap out of his overcoat and pulled it down on his head.

"Which war is it left over from?"

"They wouldn't tell me. Hasn't been a war on Osbert for twenty seven years, though."

Outside the morning was warming up. The flat sandy country around them was brightening. The half-track was parked on a patch of crushed stone next to the cafeteria.

"Think you can drive it?"

Bert stopped, then walked around the dusty grey truck. "I saw one like this in a kine once. I think I can handle it."

Vickens worried the skin on his nose. "We head south, toward the coast. I got a hunch that's the way they went with the princess."

Bert looked at the truck for a moment and then grinned. As long as he got to the princess it didn't matter what the transportation was. There might be a way to bring her back in a first class train. He caught the keys Vickens tossed him and jumped into the driver's seat.

By nightfall the truck was moving, almost reliably, along a wide road that overlooked the ocean.

"But you don't get many good trunk murders anymore," Vickens was saying. "Not since teleportation caught on."

"I still wonder," said Bert, "why they haven't sent other people on this hunt. Princess Louise is the ruler of the whole territory."

"The important thing in cases like this is surprise. The fewer people involved the easier it is to sneak up."

"About time to stop for dinner?"

"Might as well. I think we're gaining on Rhymer. They'll probably stop for the night soon, too."

"Can we go to a non-automatic place."

"I thought that was your line of work, machines and androids."

"Sure. But that lunchwagon upset me."

"You always have to be careful when you order soup," said Vickens. "Stop at the next inn you see on the left, a good place."

They parked near the sprawling dark brown place and went inside. It was crowded. There seemed to be some kind of enter-

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tainment going on up near the long bar. Everyone was laughing.

Vickens found them a table. "I have a knack for locating things."

"I hope it holds up." Bert couldn't see who was doing the entertaining. He heard two or three voices going between laughter.

"Go on up and watch the show," said Vickens. "I'll handle the ordering."

"Fine," said Bert. He wasn't too used to live waiters anyway.

Bert almost turned back when he finally got to within seeing distance of the show. He was closed in on and so he had to stand there and watch Jan Nordlin and her ventriloquism act.

The girl had two seedy looking dummies, one resting on either knee. The three of them were involved in a confused conversation that everyone around Bert seemed to think was funny.

Since he was stuck there Bert tried to listen. Quite suddenly, although he had planned not to, he laughed. And he hadn't finished laughing when Jan looked toward him and smiled in recognition. He stopped and tried to look as though he had been laughing at something he had just thought of on his own. It was no use. He started laughing again.

Biting his lip he shoved back to the table. It was ridiculous that some limited young girl could get more of a response from an audience than Donna Dayton #22. She did. You could feel something that was never there with the people who watched Bert's android.

"You like snakes?" Vickens asked Bert.

"For eating?"

"No. I thought I might tell you some famous snake crimes I've solved."

"Do that. And talk in a loud voice."

Bert squinted in the fading night. They were there sure enough. Both of Jan Nordlin's dummies, sprawled on the truck seat. "Okay," Bert called, "Where are you?"

"In here."

The voice seemed to be coming from the back of the truck. "That you, Miss Nordlin?"

Jan jumped out of the cloth covered back end of the truck. "I slept out here last night. Was that all right?"

"Why didn't you stay with the rest of the show?"

Jan brushed the tangles out of her long dark hair. "The show folded before I could join it. I'm freelancing my way south to join another troupe."

"I suppose you know we're heading south."

"Yes."

"And you want a ride."

"Could you do it?"

Bert frowned. "We're on a pretty important mission."

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"I know. Mr. Vickens told me last night." She smiled. "He trusts me."

"Then there was no reason to bother asking me."

Jan poked at the half-track treads with her foot. "Going to save the princess?"

"I hope we do. I want to meet her."

"She's the kind of important person you're interested in."

"That's right. And a blonde to boot." Bert turned away and went back into the inn.

They were crossing a stretch of flat pasture land, following a shortcut Vickens had recommended, when the front tire blew. The steering wheel took over and the truck half-circled and then slid in among a scattering of low scrub-covered dunes.

"Blow out," said Vickens as Bert got the truck stopped.

"You detectives always know what's going on." Bert got out.

"I'm not hurt in case you're wondering," said Jan, joining Bert from the back of the truck. "That tire's shot isn't it."

"Yep," said Bert.

"I'm going back and see if I can determine what caused the trouble," said Vickens. "My curiosity is aroused." He ran off, rubbing at his nose.

"Did you see a spare tire back in there?" Bert asked.

Jan locked her hands behind her. "No, sir. This will slow down your princess hunt."

"Be quiet for awhile. I'll look in case you missed it."

"Wow!" shouted Vickens from beyond the dunes.

Bert ran in the direction of the shouting. There was now a deep pit just over the last dune. It was eight feet deep and Vickens was at the bottom. "You hurt?"

"No," said Vickens. "My foot is screwed up some, but that's all."

"I'll look for a rope."

"Don't touch, stand back," cried the little round-faced man who appeared from behind a dune. "There's a code among trappers. Isn't there, Captain?"

The captain appeared. He was a big brown man in a tan uniform with all the insignia and decoration removed. "Right, Tommy. Right. This young man will have to leave our catch strictly alone."

"Right you are, Captain McKinney."

Jan was there. "Capt. McKinney of the McKinney wild animal shows?"

"That's him," said Tommy, smoothing out his dark suit. "Right, Captain?"

"For sure, Tommy. You people will have to stand back while we hoist this thing and cage it. What is it this time, Tommy?"

"I don't know, sir. But I'm hoping for a wild panther."

"Get me out of this hole," shouted Vickens.

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"There's no animal down there," said Bert. "Only our friend, Mr. Vickens."

"Protective coloration can fool you," said the captain. He crouched and moved toward the edge of the pit.

"We're short of panthers right now," Tommy said to Jan.

"It's usually either feast or famine," she said.

Captain McKinney stealthily unholstered his blaster. "All be on guard, I'm going to get a look at it."

"Let it be a panther," whispered Tommy.

"Looks like a mangy old man," said the captain.

"Don't let it fool you, Captain." Tommy stepped to the edge beside the captain. "You there, are you or are you not a wild animal?"

"I'm not wild, but I'm pretty damned mad. Now stop with the routines and fish me out."

Tommy snapped his fingers in annoyance. "You had no business falling into our animal trap if you're not an animal."

The captain straightened and holstered his gun. He uncoiled a yellow rope and, bracing himself, threw one end down to Vickens.

"The very rope we planned to tie up the wild panther with," said Tommy, turning away.

"Wow," said Vickens as Bert reached out and helped him free. "My ankle's all fouled up."

"Fair is fair," said Captain McKinney. "I'll transport you back to my animal shelter and have one of my handlers patch you up. That's the sporting thing to do."

"As long as you don't cage me."

"These are bad days for the animal show," said Tommy.

"These are bad days for everything," said Bert. He wanted to get to know the princess. He was sorry about Vickens, but it was still a delay to the rescue.

"All things considered," said Jan, tucking her legs up under her on the smooth seat," it was very sporting of Captain McKinney to loan us one of his trucks and to board Vickens until his broken leg is better."

"Why don't you throw your voice someplace where I can't hear it," said Bert, squeezing the wheel. "I'm trying to concentrate on following Vickens' trailing instructions."

"About finding the abductors' hideout."

"That's right."

"Turn left at the next cut off. Go about a mile and stop."

"You a spy?"

"No. I can follow a trail, though. And Rhymer usually hides out in the desert around here."

Bert grunted. He made the turn Jan had suggested and drove the mile. When he stopped the truck they were on flat dry country. Shaggy many-armed trees feinted in the warm wind. "I guess we leave the truck."

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"Right. See those big rocks over there?"

Bert looked. A ring of building high yellow rocks was about a half mile off. "Yeah."

"I think they might be camped in there," Jan said. "Let's gather up some of Captain McKinney's animal blasters and check." She got out and stood on the road. "Look. Smoke."

"Okay," said Bert, watching the white smoke spiral up and fade into the dark blue sky. "Let's go get the princess."

Flat on his stomach in a clump of spikey brush Bert followed Jan's pointing finger.

"That black tent probably," she said.

"Because it's the only black one?"

"Right. Rhymer is like that. I'm certain this is his camp. And that should be his tent."

"How long before nightfall you think?"

"Be dark in a hour I'd say."

Bert inched back from the cliff edge. "No use spending an hour in that damned bush."

"You know," said Jan.

"What?"

"If I went around to the other side of this enclosure and threw my voice around, you might be able to sneak down from up here and surprise 'em."

"Can ventriloquists do that?"

"I can."

"Then let's do it."

"You're sure you have to rescue the princess. You don't want to let it pass?"

"I'm not scared."

"I didn't mean that. You're set on meeting her up close?"

"Yes," said Bert.

"Fine then. When it gets dark I'll scoot around and impersonate an invading army. You sneak down and rescue the princess."

"You'll be careful?"

Jan smiled faintly and moved back away from him and sat hugging her knees until it was almost night.

Even though he was expecting it, the army startled Bert. There were at least twenty hard fighting, gruff-voiced soldiers descending on the camp from the sound of it.

Bert let himself fall the rest of the way down the cliffside. He drew a hand blaster and moved ahead on all fours. The black tent was thirty yards away and he'd have to pass two lighted tents to get to it. While he moved quietly along three bearded mercenaries shot out of the nearest tent, waving blasters. They didn't sound as tough as Jan's army.

When the second tent emptied Bert stood up, almost straight. Then he ran to the black tent, edged around it and stepped in with his gun ready.

A single lamp burned on a low folding table. Sitting in a camp chair was the princess. No one

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else was there. She did look very much like Donna Dayton.

Bert swallowed and moved nearer the princess. "Forgive me, your highness. I've come to take you back to your people." He bowed, hoping he was doing it right.

The princess did not blink, nor did she speak.

Drugged probably. "Don't worry, your highness," said Bert. "I'll carry you off safely. The best doctors on Osbert will snap you out of this."

In his excitement at being this close to an actual princess Bert became clumsy. Just short of her chair he tripped over a dropped canteen and stumbled over onto the princess.

Bert caught at her and tried to right the chair, but it was too late. The princess pitched out of his hands and fell to the hard ground.

She rattled once or twice, one arm flapped with a buzzing, and then she was still.

Bert looked at the princess. She'd been cold when he touched her. And she'd rattled. That wasn't the kind of thing a princess was supposed to do.

Bert lunged and caught up the princess. He shook her. Rattle she did. He became detached from any sense of time. He was still shaking the mechanical princess when two of Rhymer's men grabbed him.

Rhymer's long sharp nose sparkled in the firelight. He rumpled his tight-curled black hair. "The other one is an android, too?"

Bert nodded, his manacles jiggling. "Right."

Rhymer laughed. "You're on their side. No doubt you were sent to throw me off. At this very moment I am on my way to return that blinking android and abduct the real princess."

"The Princess Louise they've got is Donna Dayton #22. The one you've got is #10."

"How am I going to get my daughter on the throne, a position she's ideally suited for, if I can't find the real princess and keep her out of the way."

"Mr. Rhymer," said Bert, "I'll tell you how it is." He avoided looking at Jan, who sat across the campfire from him. "About two minutes after I saw your princess in there I figured it out. The Prime Minister was anxious to have my Donna Dayton android in the palace. He sent me and one middle-aged operative out to bring back the princess. I don't think they care, on Monarchy Hill, whether they get this android back or not. They're got one just like it working for them."

"You suspect there's no real princess?"

"Biz Enterprises has three dozen of those androids in circulation. I bet about five years ago they looked the other way and let the Prime Minister acquire one."

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"Look," said Jan. "Bert is right. I'm sure when Bert gets back to Monarchy Hill BE will have other plans for him. They did sell the PM the other Donna Dayton, Bert."

"You knew about the deal?" He looked at her now.

"Well, yes," she said. "Somebody still had to do the voices for all those speeches. I'm sorry. You wanted to come and look. So I let you."

"Ha," said Rhymer. "I don't have to wait for a contest. I will simply expose this corrupt government and put my daughter on the throne, right at the very top of Monarchy Hill." He slapped his hands together and laughed again.

"Could you turn us loose, too?" asked Bert. "We've got a borrowed truck to return."

"You're prisoners of war."

"The war hasn't started yet."

"That's right," said Rhymer, motioning two minions to unlock Bert and Jan. "Will you be leaving tonight? Should you stay on till morning there will be a chance to meet my daughter, the future princess."

"Not me," said Jan. "I've got to catch up with a show down south." She shook free of the manacles and walked away into the darkness beyond the fire.

Bert flexed his fingers. "A real princess, huh?"

"Beyond any doubt," grinned Rhymer. "And a stunning blonde, with a real gift for trombone improvization."

Bert smiled. "Give her my best wishes for a happy reign."

"You're not staying then?"

"I have to return a truck. And then I may be joining a show in the south."

"More androids?"

"No," said Bert, starting after Jan. "Real people."

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Vance Aandahl is now nineteen, a sophomore English literature major at the University of Colorado, and plans to teach college English himself, while continuing to write. His THE ZARL MAN has appeared in New World Writing #18 *(Lippincott), and ADAM FROST was scheduled for this April's* Playboy. *He is a basketball- and chess-player as well, and a cartoonist: "At the ripe age of twelve I nearly ran away from home to seek employment in the Disney studios." His other interests include debating, philosophy, folk songs, and literature of all sorts. With each story of Vance Aandahl's that we see, we grow increasingly amazed and impressed. Only new readers will need to be told that he is the author of THE MAN ON THE BEACH (F&SF, Jan. 1961) and COGI DROVE HIS CAR THROUGH HELL (F&SF, Aug., 1961). Rarely has such talent been matched with such youth, surely the Walt Whitman quotation-title provides each of us with the opportunity of saying to Mr. Aandahl—as Emerson did to Whitman on the publication of LEAVES OF GRASS—*"I greet you at the beginning of a great career;" *to agree that* "this sunbeam were no illusion, but . . . a sober certainty." *So many thoughts of Whitman's poem does this story evoke, that we were moved to read it once more, and in that great and beautiful dirge, that lovely lament, line after line seemed to presage elements of this striking (but of course utterly different) story. The ever-returning spring, the shades of night, the cruel hands that hold powerless the helpless soul, the long black trail, and—ever again—the strong perfumed lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green . . .*

WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOMED

by Vance Aandahl

STANDING KNEEDEEP IN PRAIRIE grass, Robert Smith lifted his hands to the blueness of the sky, as though to touch the clouds or catch the wind, and knew that he was the last man to leave the city.

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Purple mountains stood to the west, and rivers ran down the piney slopes into the prairie, bringing life to the soil where they wandered. Life was everywhere, in the kaleidoscope of flowers that grew at his feet, in the angry murmur of summer locusts, in the hot silent gliding of three hawks that soared overhead. But Robert Smith knew that he was alone.

For many days, after It had found him, he had been cajoled and tempted and frightened by the inescapable buzz of its messages. He had run from the city, which was an empty place, and as he had run, It's maddening words had followed him far into the country before finally fading away. He did not know where It was. He did not know what It was. He only knew that It wanted him, just as It had wanted the others. He was alone, and he was frightened.

In the city, he had lived with three others. Each day they had hunted together, and they had been happy. But It had come and conquered his three friends; and they had gone, one by one, walking slowly away, their eyes as bright and blind as coins. He did not know where they had gone, but he knew that they were dead. It had fed upon them.

Robert Smith lowered his arms and gazed in despair toward the mountains. Already his stomach was cold with hunger. He could not live on the prairie, but in the foothills he might find fruit. With the ironic smile of one who senses death but hardly cares, he began to shuffle through the vast field of waving grass.

He was a tall man, strong and leathery, with broad shoulders and lean limbs. He wore tattered rags, stiff with sun-baked grime and sweat. His hair and beard mingled into a black cascade of filth across his chest and shoulders. Only his green eyes seemed to be alive.

He walked for hours, watching the sun pass overhead, drop toward the mountain, and paint the plains with their dark shadows. The sensuous glow of dusk filled the sky, and with it came the eddying night winds of summer. White clouds drifted near from the west and hung over the peaks, where they were suffused with lavender and gold by the dying sun. As darkness came, the wind grew cold and fast, the clouds tumbled in swollen rage across the sky, and the earth hovered in a silent moment of fear.

Suddenly, the night was very black. Robert Smith moved on, seeking some protection from the coming storm. Before he could find shelter, lightning severed the sky, the clouds opened, and he was lost in a grey torrent of rain. It pounded at his shoulders and stung his face; stunned by the impact, he staggered numbly to one side, sank to his hands and knees, and shook

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his head stupidly. Through the throbbing ache of his mind, passing as easily as a knife through cheese, came a strange but familiar buzzing. He rolled onto his back and clutched at his temples. But the buzzing only grew louder . . .

. . . *Come to me. Where I am, it does not rain. Where I am, there is only happiness. Come to me. I am strong and good. Come to me. Come to me* . . .

"No!" screamed Robert Smith, writhing in the mud. "I don't want to die!"

Slowly, the words faded, drifting away as casually and easily as they had come, leaving him exhausted and trembling with terror. He forced himself to his feet and wandered blindly through the storm until, with a windy moan, it passed on to the east, leaving him alone. He stepped forward once and fell to the ground.

When Robert Smith slept, he dreamed . . .

He was a child again. Spring had come, and the whole world was dewy with life. He ran down an alley, kicking one tin can after another, stopping to pet a laughing collie, climbing onto an ashpit and scanning the neighborhood for the pure joy of seeing. Then he came to the place where the lilacs grew. It was someone's yard—he did not know whose—and it was full of lilacs, like a jungle, like the greenhouse he had once visited, so dense and green that all he had to do was stand quietly and no one would know he was there. He crawled under the foliage, burrowing through leaves and dirt until he came to the trunk of the largest bush; once there, he rolled onto his back and gazed solemnly at the vast field of green leaves that hung six inches above his nose. Through this field crept a score of tiny dust motes, each one illuminated by a thin ray from the sun, each one dotting his face with a freckle of light.

For a long time, in his dream, he did not move. It was enough to be alive, to feel the soil with his hands, to see the greenness of the leaves, to smell the perfume of the flowers. It was enough to watch a spider move from leaf to leaf, lifting one leg with care, and then another, and then leaping to another leaf. It was enough to breath the sweet air, to watch his chest rising and falling, pulsing with the slow laconic confidence of life.

There was dew on the lilacs, and he found himself looking into one droplet that hung like a pendant from the very tip of a petal. It was faintly lavender, yet clear as glass; it shone with a strange light. Gazing at it, he saw himself mirrored in its gentle curve, smiling with the wide-eyed curiosity of any child. He was content; he was happy to be himself. The past and the future were nothing, and only he and the lavender mirror that hung over his face really mattered.

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Suddenly, the leaves blackened and curled and drifted away; the flower turned to ash and fell into his eyes. Suddenly, he was dashing across a burning lawn, running among bonfire trees, hiding his eyes from the great white ball of flame that had engulfed the sky. Suddenly, he was only a man, running and screaming, trying now to forget, trying to find water, trying to escape, trying to escape from the flames and the strange, terrible buzzing that now came with the flames—the hideous buzzing that shrieked its message again and again. . . .

. . . *Come to me. You are mine, and I am yours. I am good. I can help you. Come to me. Come to me* . . .

Robert Smith awoke, shouting wildly and covering his face with trembling hands. For a long while, then, he lay quietly, peering through his fingers at the night sky above. Then he arose, and marched on toward the mountains.

After two or three hours, he reached the first swell of the foothills, climbed it slowly, and descended into the little valley between it and the next. Here he found a stream and three cottonwoods. He washed himself in the cold water, scraping the mud from his clothes, and lay down in a grassy pocket between two of the trees. Like a child, he watched the breeze moving through the foliage overhead, and then fell asleep.

When he awoke, the faint warmth of sunlight was on his face. For a moment, he did not open his eyes, but only lay quietly, savoring the last luxurious moments of dreamless sleep. Then, when he parted his eyelids with the drowsy langour of one who does not want to see everything at once, the first thing that came into view was a milky flower of light—the sun, raising into the cloudy morning sky, half-hidden behind the solid wall of white that stretched from the far eastern horizon to the mountains. The next thing he saw was a hawk, soaring high in the sky, black as night against clouds. The third thing he saw was a face.

She was standing ten feet away, one hand touching the rutted trunk of a cottonwood—standing as slender as a reed, even in the heavy deer-hide clothes that she wore. Her face was slender too, like a thin oval, and circled with an aura of coiling black hair. Her eyes were large and darkly hued, like thunderheads; they seemed to glow with a purple light. Her nose was as gentle and perfect as her hands, but her mouth was strangely twisted by a single scar—a white scar that curled across her sunbrowned cheek, cut through both lips, and furrowed to a halt at the tip of her chin. It was as though some great sculptor had fashioned her, and then, dissatisfied at having not attained complete perfec-

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tion, had struck the beautiful face with his chisel.

Robert Smith turned his head and gazed at her. He had not seen a woman for three years, and he had never seen one like this. His fingers moved in the grass.

She touched her throat with one hand, seeing that he was awake. Suddenly, she ran from the tree to the top of the nearest hill, some hundred feet away. There she stood, once more like a statue, returning his unbroken gaze.

Robert Smith was neither good nor evil, for he lived in a world where morals had died with civilization; rising from the ground, he was faced with no ethical dilemma, only with a tactical problem. Could he catch the girl? Did she have friends nearby? Heedless of the possible danger, he began to ascend the slope of the hill, whistling through his nose and watching the girl with strangely sensitive eyes.

She let him come close, then laughed and ran down the far side of the hill, weaving through a field of red boulders at its base. Too excited to think, Rogert Smith ran after her, his arms and legs jerking against the wind, his face locked in a tragicomic mask of desire. Through the boulder field he ran, dodging and stumbling, falling once to his knees, rising again, falling again, falling through the grass and into a pit, where he collapsed like a fallen puppet. He knew instantly what had happened. Clawing upright, he jumped for the edge of the pit; but it was out of reach. He fell to his knees, sobbing, ashamed of being trapped, afraid to die. In the midst of his anguish, a gentle buzzing was born. It lapped at his mind like the tide, growing with each pulse, surging forward with more power, tearing at the dykes of sanity . . .

. . . *Come to me. You will not suffer with me. You can rest, you can sleep with me. Where I am their is no trap, no death. Come to me. Come to me* . . .

Convulsed with horror, he shrieked. Then, slowly at first, but finally with a horrid rapidity, he began to writhe, moving rhythmically from one side of the pit to the other, floundering back and forth like an earthworm caught in the sun. At last he stopped. Only his fingers moved, twitching among the leaves, burrowing into the soil, locking and unlocking with terrible frequency.

Overhead, gazing down at him from one lip of the pit, four men shuddered at the sight, lowered their spears, and touched each other's foreheads. Kneeling on the other side, the girl with the scar trembled once and began to cry . . .

When Robert Smith awoke, his hands and feet were bound and he was lying on his back in the darkness of a hut. The only opening was a small airhole in the roof, which dropped a slanting cone of

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sunlight across his torso, firing the fine hairs of his chest with a reddish-gold luster. For a long while, he gazed at the airhole; it seemed to be a blue moon in the night sky of the hut, casting its magic beams across the earth, his flesh. Somehow, it reminded him of a lilac bush, a place of the long past, a place where one could lie on one's back and look upward, just as he now did.

Then, the door opened, and through it hulked a great beast of a man. Silhouetted against the sunlight, his body was like the trunk of an oak tree; but his head was no larger than a grapefruit. He moved forward, dragging one useless, shriveled leg behind him, balancing the weight of his body on his left foot and the knuckles of his right hand. With his left hand, he pulled curiously at Robert Smith's beard. He himself was without hair—his sunbrowned skin was as smooth as wax.

Robert Smith had heard of such things. Certain people of the city, who had ventured into the countryside, were wont to whisper of fearful creatures, hairless and scarred, their flesh burnt with strange colors—creatures who walked like men and sang their hunting songs to the skies. He had never believed such tales, nor had he cared for the men who told them—bright eyed youngsters who thought that words were worth food. But now he saw, with growing fear, that the stories were true.

The intruder grabbed him by an ankle and laboriously began to pull his bound body toward the door, puffing through waxen nostrils, squinting both eyes, and shaking his soft lips with each jerk. Within a few seconds, he had pulled Robert Smith into the sunlight.

Lifting his head, Robert Smith saw that he was in a village of some sort: about twenty huts, all identical, were arranged in a circle, each one facing into the center. In the compound which they delineated, there was a scattering of crude looms, tanning racks, and stone ovens, around which clustered women and children. At the very center of the compound stood three stone pillars, circled by a hedge of boulders. Flowers grew within this hedge, and words had been carefully engraved in each of the three stone pillars. Robert Smith could not read them, so he let his head drop back in the dust and looked longingly at the clear blue sky above.

Presently, he heard two voices arise from the village murmur and become distinct. Glancing sideways, he saw that two men had joined his jailer. Both wore buckskin clothes; both, unlike the jailer, had hair, which they wore in long braids. One of them was tall as the trees and thin as the wind, with a black spot, the size of a man's eye, which seemed to be branded on his forehead. The other was of a nor-

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mal height, also thin—but not as lean and hungry as the other, and graced with the most marvelous purple eyes—eyes like those of the girl with the scar.

"Is he a nomad?" asked the tall man, pursing his lips and touching the captive's ribs with his toe.

"He wears a beard," said the other. "He's not a nomad."

"Then what is he?"

They seemed perplexed. Crouching by his side, they studied Robert Smith's features. Disdainfully, he rolled his head over and watched the women cooking.

"His hands seem soft for a nomad's," said the tall man.

"My daughter has said that his soul is possessed by the Devil."

"What does she mean?"

"When they caught him, he screamed with agony. He fainted."

When they had finished studying his features, the two men arose and turned to the jailer.

"Nomad. Is he one of your people?"

The jailer glanced slyly at Robert Smith. He rubbed his wrists and licked his lips, but did not speak.

"Do you know?" asked the tall man.

The nomad shook his head, neither in negation nor affirmation, but rather with a quivering motion, as though it were a melon on a stalk.

The man with purple eyes laughed. "The nomad is brainless. Let us ask the man himself."

"Why? He would only lie."

Robert Smith continued to stare at the women cooking. Without moving, he said, "I am from the city."

For a moment, there was silence.

"The ruined city?"

"Yes."

"Why did you come?" The man with purple eyes frowned savagely. "To rape our women?"

"I was driven out."

"Who did it?"

Robert Smith rolled his head over and smiled laconically at his captors. "I don't know. Something."

The two men looked at each other in solemn curiosity.

"He's mad," said the tall one. "What do we do?"

"I don't know,'" said the other. "We should probably ask the Rev."

"That means a long wait."

"Yes, Joseph, but we musn't act rashly."

Once again, the tall man turned to Robert Smith.

"Do you know the Faith? Is the Savior's Word known in the city?"

During all this while, Robert Smith had been trying to seem calm and disdainful. In the city, only cool pride could save a captured man from death. In the thirty years that he had lived there, Robert Smith, with great showings of hateur, had saved himself from torture three times. But now, a bound captive in a strange village, he was suddenly assailed

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with doubts. He did not understand these men. Their words were nonsense.

"Come," said the man with purple eyes, "attest to your beliefs."

"Are you a Christian?" asked the tall man, smiling gently now.

Robert Smith, bewildered by these seemingly kind yet meaningless questions, could only shrug his shoulders and smile back.

"Yes," said the man with purple eyes. "We had best wait for the Rev."

"What do you think? Is he truly ignorant? Or is he trying to hide his animal sins behind . . . behind a shield of innocence?" The tall man smiled, proud of his words.

"The Rev shall know."

Together, they departed. As soon as they had gone, the hulking jailer arose from the dust, where he had been playing with a handful of dried grass. Grunting ferociously, he dragged Robert Smith back into the hut and locked the door.

For many hours, he lay quietly, sometimes pondering the strange questions that he had been asked, sometimes thoughtlessly watching the blue moon of the airhole above, sometimes sleeping fitfully. His stomach was cold and knotted with hunger, but he knew that they would not starve him. When the moon had darkened to cobalt, and the far wall of the hut was lined with cracks and chinks of smoldering red sunset, his jailer entered, carrying a bowl of gruel. With him came the girl, almost pale with fear. Motioning for the nomad to leave, she took the bowl and lifted it to Robert Smith's lips. When he was through, he rolled over on his side and tried to ignore her; presently, though, she spoke.

"What is your name?"

"Robert Smith."

"They say that you come from the city."

He grunted.

"Please talk to me."

He rolled over. "Why?"

"I thought that you would ask me why I came."

"Why did you come?" He spoke listlessly, aping her words without emotion.

"I came to help you. You tried to hurt me, so now I must help you."

"What?" He was curious.

"That is the way. I must teach you."

"Do you really want to help me?" He spoke cautiously.

"Yes."

"Would you free me?"

"Oh, no. Then you would only try to hurt me again."

"No," he said, licking his lips. "No, not at all. I just want to escape."

"I shall help you in another way. I shall teach you about God."

"Who's he?"

"He is your Father."

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"Oh."

"He is my Father too."

Robert Smith sighed and lay back in the dust.

"Please," she said, "listen to the words of my people." She arose, went to the door, and called for the nomad. He came and pulled Robert Smith to the open door of the hut. The girl sat next to him.

"Look."

All the men of the village, some thirty of them, had gathered around the little wall that circled the three stone pillars. Each one fell to his knees and crossed his hands on the wall. For a while, they kneeled there, doing nothing. Then a middle-aged man, rather nondescript in the fading light of dusk, appeared from behind one of the huts. Dressed in a long brown robe, he walked to the wall, stepped solemnly over it, and raised his right hand to his forehead. Then he kneeled before each of the three pillars, mumbling strange words to himself.

"Isn't it beautiful," said the girl, touching her forehead as she spoke.

"I don't understand," said Robert Smith. "What are they doing?"

"Watch."

The man in brown robes had turned. Facing the men of the village, he touched his forehead; they arose together, and each man touched the forehead of the one to his right. Then they began to speak, chanting in unison.

"I believe in the great holy Father, Who has made me and the flowers.

"And I believe in the great holy Father's holy Son, Joseph Christ, Who was born of a flower, Who suffered the pain of the fires for two hundred years, Who died in the Greatest Fire, Who returned to his great holy Father in the blue skies, where He may watch me live among the flowers.

"And I believe in the holy Flower, the holy Flowery Church of Christianism, the forgiveness of sins, the transcendence of the body, and the holy eternal life."

Then they dropped to their knees and bowed their heads—all but the man in the brown robes; he stooped and picked a handful of flowers. Going to the wall, he walked from man to man, placing a petal in the hair of each, mumbling quietly to himself. When he was through, he took three flowers and placed one at the base of each pillar. Then he turned and touched his forehead; each man arose and touched the forehead of the one to his right. Once again, they began to chant.

"I believe in the great holy Father . . ."

"They've already done that," said Robert Smith, perplexed by the ceremony.

"Quiet," whispered the girl. "They must do it three times."

"Why?" he asked. "What does it mean?"

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"It means everything," she murmured. "Those words are the most beautiful words men have ever known. Good men have spoken them for thousands of years, even before the great fires, and they are far older than that."

Robert Smith licked his lips. "But what do they mean? Why haven't I heard them before? Who is this father and . . ."

"The great holy Father and the holy Son and the holy Flower—they are God." Her purple eyes shone in the last rays of the sun. "Watch and listen. That is all you need to do."

In the morning, after eating another bowl of gruel, Robert Smith was visited again by the two men who had questioned him. With them came the girl, still shy and frightened.

"Robert Smith," said the tall man, "did you think carefully last night?"

He grunted noncomittally. During the night, his bonds had cut into the flesh of wrists and ankles. He was cold and stiff with pain.

"You told us that you know nothing of God. But they say that you are possessed by the Devil. How can that be?"

"I don't know."

"They say that you rolled with agony in the pit—that your mouth foamed with madness and your eyes burned with the light of the great fires."

For a long while, Robert Smith stared at his captors. When he finally spoke, his voice trembled.

"Who is the devil? What is he like?"

"He is the source of all man's sin, the destroyer of life."

"Does he talk . . . talk to men?"

"He tempts all men."

"Does he tell them to come to him?"

"Yes, yes, of course. The Devil is the great tempter."

"If men go to the devil, does he hurt them? Does he kill them?"

"Yes. You are right." The tall man spoke with somber certainty. "The Devil will destroy you."

"But how can one fight the devil?"

Suddenly, the girl pushed forward. "You must go to God instead! If only you have faith, you will be saved!"

"But, but who is this god?"

"He is the great holy Father and the holy Son and the holy Flower. He is Salvation."

"Can he save me from the devil?"

"Yes. He can save all men, even you."

"Then I must go to him."

"Yes," cried the girl. "You must come into the Light of God!"

"Just a minute," said the man with purple eyes, who seemed to be the girl's father. "We can't do anything until the Rev returns."

"But father," cried the girl.

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"Can't you see? He wants to save himself! Can't we teach him to worship with us?"

"Yes," said the tall man. "I think that we must take some sort of action. The Rev won't return for at least a week; and we certainly won't hurt this man by leading him to God."

"Perhaps not," said the girl's father. "But remember, he tried to rape my child. Perhaps he's just another nomad. It would be a great sin to allow a nomad to worship God."

"I only want him to know," said the girl. "We won't allow him to worship with us, or to walk freely through the village. But we can teach him about God! Besides . . ."

"Quiet," said the tall man. He turned to Robert Smith. "Are you truly possessed by the Devil?"

Robert Smith swallowed hard. He didn't understand these people, nor did he like them. But they seemed to know about It; they seemed to think that they could save him.

"Yes," he said. "The devil talks to me; and in the city, I have seen all of my friends destroyed by the devil."

"Oh!" the girl cried out. All three of them touched their foreheads.

"Do you truly wish to renounce the Devil?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

"And do you wish to embrace Christianism instead? Do you wish to enter the kingdom of God?"

For a moment, Robert Smith hesitated. Perhaps god was no better than devil; perhaps this was some kind of trap. Then he remembered the look he had seen in the eyes of his friends—men who had gone quietly to It. He knew that he had no choice.

"Yes, I wish to do those things."

"Well," said the tall man, "he seems sincere enough. But he knows nothing. It will be like teaching a child."

"Yes," said the girl, her purple eyes flashing with excitement. "I know. Like a child."

The days that followed were full of monotony and frustration for Robert Smith. After living in the ruined city all his life, he was fascinated by the beauty of the countryside; he longed to run across the grassy meadows, to climb the piney mountain slopes, to hunt with the men of the village. But he was kept under a close guard. During the nights, they bound him with ropes and locked him in the hut. When morning came, he was brought food. Then the nomad untied his feet and led him to the top of a hill, a few hundred feet from the village, where he had to sit quietly and listen to the incessant chatter of the girl. She told him nothing. She spoke only in riddles.

"Has the Devil talked to you?" she would ask, eyes full of anxiety.

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"No," he would answer, gazing thoughtlessly across the rolling green fields. "Not since the time in the pit."

She would laugh then, and clap her hands.

For one entire day, they talked about God.

"He is your Father," she said. "He is my Father, and your Father, and all men's Father. He is the Father of the world, for He made everything when there was nothing. And He has given us the flowers. They are our comfort and protection."

"How could anyone do all that?"

"God is perfect. He knows everything. He is everywhere. He can do anything."

"But why can't we see him?"

"You can," she cried. "You must! If you only open your heart, you will see all His divine goodness and mercy!"

But Robert Smith could not see God. Sitting on the hill, gazing across the land or into the sky, he would try with all his strength to see the divine Father. He could see the green summer grass, undulating in countless waves toward the horizon; he could see a river, wandering in aimless beauty, eddying into little ponds and lakes, where trees grew and birds sang; he could see the colors of the great mountains, whose purple peaks, even under the summer sun, were covered with shawls of bright purple peaks, even under the summer sun, and clean from horizon to horizon, dotted with a fleet of far distant clouds. But he could not see God, no matter how hard he tried.

They spent many days on the hill, talking about Joseph Christ and the holy Flower, speaking of sin (which he did not understand), or merely exchanging information about each other's childhood. One day, he told her about the lilacs.

"Why, that's wonderful!" she cried. "And it proves something, too: even you, Robert, who never knew about God—even you could see Him when you were an innocent child!"

"No. I just liked flowers. Lilacs. I just liked to lay down under the lilacs and forget about everything."

"But it made you happy?"

"Yes."

"Then you must have known, somewhere in your heart, that God had given you those lilacs."

He smiled at her. The scar that crossed her mouth no longer bothered him, as it once had. And her eyes were like the lilacs, only darker—like lilacs after sunset.

"Perhaps," he said, "I did."

She laughed gently. "I know where lilac bushes grow. Down by the river."

"Really?"

"Yes. But they aren't in bloom now."

"Can we go? May I see them?"

She shook her head. "No, Rob-

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ert. The Rev would not approve."

"Who is the Rev?"

Suddenly, she became very grave. "He is God's leader among men. He teaches us the songs of God; he helps us find true faith. He is a very wise and very good man."

"Why isn't he in the village?"

"He and ten other men went to the north, a month ago, to look for nomads and new kinds of flowers."

Robert Smith wrinkled his brow.

"We use the nomads for slaves. But the new flowers—the new flowers will make our poor lives happier."

They sat in silence. Then she glanced excitedly at him.

"When the Rev comes back, I'm sure he'll let you worship with us! Soon you'll be one of the village!"

"Will I be free to go?"

"Yes. But . . . but you won't want to go." She looked sadly away, toward the river. Then she leaned back and rested against the slope of the hill. "Maybe we can go to the lilac bushes—sometime soon. Would you like that?"

"Yes," he said, smiling.

The next day, when they went once more to the hill, she began whispering to the nomad. At first he seemed confused, but then he nodded his melon head, sat down in the grass, and began to hunt for pebbles.

"Come," she said, turning to Robert Smith. "We can go to the lilacs. The nomad won't tell anyone."

For the first time in weeks, Robert Smith felt free. He stood up and looked at her; then he laughed gently and smiled. Together, they ran down the far slope of the hill until they came to the little stream that wandered there; together, they ran along its bank, sometimes stopping to gasp for breath, sometimes slipping in the grass. Laughing at each other, she in her buckskin jacket, he with his hands tied behind his back, they raced around a curve in the course of the stream green wall—a wall of lilacs, so thick and high that it hid the mountains, so wide that it seemed to be the ramparts of an entire fortress.

"It's a forest," he cried. "It's a forest of lilacs!"

"Yes," she said, giggling at his childish joy. "Do you like them?"

"Yes. But where are the flowers?"

"They aren't in bloom. They soon will be, though. You can see the buds."

Going closer, he saw a thousand points of soft purple appear in the wall of green; where the light of the sun fell on them, they glowed like tiny eyes. He ran forward and eagerly sniffed at them.

"Untie my hands," he cried.

For a moment, the girl hesitated.

"Please!"

"First you must promise," she said, "not to run away."

"I promise," he cried, turning his back to her so that she could untie his hands.

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"No," she said, smiling gently. "You must promise with a flower."

"Yes," he said, "with a flower."

She went to the riverbank and found a tiny yellow flower there, which she picked carefully and brought to him.

"You must hold it in your mouth when you promise, and then you must swallow it." She put it on his tongue.

His mind had already soared into the past, into the green world of lilacs and alleys and laughing collies, into the world of his childhood. He was a boy again, racing up and down the sidewalk with his friends, wrestling with them in the sweet green grass. Something was in his mouth. He could see his mother, holding a plateful of doughnuts in her hands, and for a moment he thought that a doughnut was in his mouth. But it was smaller than a doughnut; it did not taste like a doughnut. It seemed almost tasteless, and it felt flimsy and flat on his tongue . . . suddenly, for only a brief moment, he seemed to know where he was and what was in his mouth. The place was dark, and all he could see were distant candlelights, his own folded hands, and the face of a man in robes . . . in robes . . . in robes he was dressed, and when had Robert Smith seen a man dressed in robes? Once long ago and once now and once a week ago . . .

"Do you promise?"

His reverie shattered and dissolved. He was standing by a stream with a girl, and in his mouth was a flower.

"Yes," he murmured, "I promise. I promise not to run away . . ." Then he swallowed the flower, quickly, so as not to taste it. She stepped behind him and untied the ropes that held his hands. When they were free, he held them in front of him and flexed his wrists.

"Come," she said. She led him into the forest of lilacs. He followed her slowly, only half conscious, only half aware of the world he was in. His mind went struggling back into the past, trying to reconstruct the momentary image that he had seen, trying to grasp something that now seemed terribly important.

They sat down in a clearing. She picked a leaf and brushed it against her lips; but he did nothing.

"Why are you so quiet?" she asked, her eyes suddenly widening with fear.

"I think," he said slowly, "that I have . . . have worshiped God before—when I was very young . . ."

"When you were young? In the city?"

"Yes . . ."

"Oh! But . . . but how do you know?"

"I remembered . . . something . . . when you made me promise with the flower."

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She did not speak, but there was a question in her gentle smile.

"It was inside; and it was dark. There was a man in robes. But . . . but instead of flowers there were candles . . ."

"Candles! But candles burn! Candles mean flame!"

"Yes, but . . ."

"And flame means the Great Fire! You weren't worshiping God! You were . . . you were worshiping the Devil! You were damning yourself to the eternal flame! You . . ."

"Quiet!" he shouted at her, angry for the first time. "I don't care what you think! I don't care what you say! It was . . . it was good. The candles were good."

"Stop talking like a nomad! You act . . . you act as though you knew about religion! I'm teaching you!" Her hands trembled. She leaned forward and touched his forehead; then she touched hers. "You must be patient," she said. "You must believe what I tell you."

"Why?" he asked. "Because you tell it? Or because it's right? Perhaps nothing is right." He rolled back in the leaves and pushed at his temples. "Why, why, why? . . ."

Suddenly the buzzing came to him, entering his mind, as it always did, when he was in anguish, heightening that anguish to madness, twisting him with torment . . .

. . . Come to me. There are no "whys" where I am. Where I am, there is only rest and peace. Come to me. Come to me . . .

He writhed on the ground until It left him. When he opened his eyes, the girl was crying.

"It is the Devil! You're nothing but a creature of the Devil!"

He leaped to his feet and grabbed her. She struggled to escape, but his arms pulled her against him, and his mouth closed on hers. Then, with the strength of fear, she shoved him away and diasppeared into the bushes.

"Come back!" he cried. "Come back! I don't want to hurt you! I don't, I don't . . ."

He rushed after her, ripping his clothes on the branches that seemed to hold him back. Then he burst into the sunlight, and saw her running along the stream, already far ahead of him.

"Come back!" he cried. "I love you! I don't want to hurt you!"

He ran after her, along the stream and up the hill, where he found her huddling behind the broad bole of the nomad's body.

"Kill him," she whispered. "Kill him . . ."

As she rushed down the hill, toward the village, the nomad clumsily lifted his spear and giggled at Robert Smith. There was a moment of hesitation, and then the spear hissed by his ear; he darted past the nomad and sprinted down the hill. For only a moment he paused,

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and then he rushed into the compound, where the girl was standing proudly beside her father. In a moment, Robert Smith was pinned to the ground by three young men of the village.

Above his face hovered a spear. Drowning in sudden fear, he could only faintly hear the voice of the girl's father:

"Robert Smith! You have sinned again! You have turned upon the innocent child who tried to help you! The Rev has returned, and he shall be your judge."

They lifted him to his feet. Trembling, he looked into the great, shaggy, leonine face of the man they called the Rev—a man who stood nearly seven feet tall, a man whose eyes gazed down at Robert Smith with frightening confidence.

"You have sinned at the very feet of God," he said, murmuring softly through two craggy lips. "You must be made to repent for the evil in your soul. You must be made to suffer seven times the suffering of death . . ."

"No!" cried Robert Smith, dropping to his knees and groveling shamelessly at the feet of the huge man. "I didn't hurt her! I didn't want to . . ."

As his eyes misted with fear, he suddenly felt It touch his mind once again, pause for a moment, and enter with a buzzing fury . . .

. . . *Come to me. You must come to me. All of you must come to me, for I am God. I am God. Come to me . . .*

When It had faded away, he lifted his weeping face from the dust and looked at his captors. They stood like statues, captives themselves, neither moving nor speaking. Their eyes were strangely dead, like the eyes of the blind, like strange gray stones . . .

"You're dead!" he screamed. "It killed you, It killed you!"

"Quiet!" thundered the Rev, breaking their silence with a majestic toss of his great head. "It is our God. He has called us." He paused, lifting his face to the blue skies above. "Come, my people, come with me to God." He turned, and as he turned, the people of the village turned with him. Slowly, his open hand left aloft, he began walking toward the east; with him, like an army of the dead, went the people of the village.

"Stop!" cried Robert Smith, staring in horror. "It wants to kill you! Stop!"

They did not hear him. They were lost in Its power.

"Help me," cried Robert Smith, turning to the half dozen nomads who stood watching him. "Help me save them!"

One of the nomads giggled and lifted his spear. "Kill," said another.

Robert Smith wheeled and ran. Behind him, the nomads squealed

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and wheezed with excitement; he could hear them lumbering in pursuit. Rocks and a spear sailed over his head. With each step, he widened the distance between himself and his sluggish pursuers, but before he could reach the army of villagers, he felt his left shoulder burst open with sudden, flaming pain. He stumbled once, but kept running until he reached the people of the village.

Behind him, the nomads had ceased their pursuit. Looking back, he saw one of them lift a spear from the dust—a spear whose crude stone point glistened red in the sun.

Robert Smith staggered on. Vaguely, he realized that two of the men were helping him. Then, as darkness flooded the gray spinning haze before his eyes, he felt them lift his sagging body and bear it aloft . . .

He awoke to the stars. They swam through the night sky with each pulsing wave of pain, dancing the mad, chaotic dance of his own death. Then a silhouette blotted them out, and he saw that the girl was kneeling over him, the girl who loved him as a child and hated him as a man, gazing into his face with eyes that no longer glowed purple, eyes that now were dead.

"Robert Smith," she said, "we have come to the Gates of Heaven. When the sun rises, we shall go to God. Are you ready? Have you repented?" She spoke with toneless disinterest, like some kind of machine.

"Help me," he whispered. "I'm dying . . ."

"God will help you," she said, "if you repent." Then she was gone, and all he could see were the stars spinning through the night sky.

When next he awoke, the sun was hot on his face, and he was alone. The others had left him to die. Somehow, the pain was gone; but half of his body was numb and senseless. Struggling to his knees, he saw that he was on a hill, not far from the ruined city. Twenty feet away two great boulders formed the portal of a cave—a cave made by the hand of man, a cave whose depths emitted a strange light. Instantly, he knew that he had come to the gates of heaven—to the den of the creature that tormented him; and as soon as he knew, It came easily into his mind. He had no strength to struggle, no strength to battle the power of Its buzzing commands . . .

. . . *Now you must come to me. Now you must join me* . . .

It took control of his body, making him stumble forward, forcing him into the cave, directing him down a long, winding passage, through door after door of dull lead, each of which It opened before him and closed behind him, pushing him relentlessly on, into the depths of Its lair. He finally came to the largest door, twenty

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feet in height, that slid open with the slow grandeur of death, revealing, as it opened, a room that had no visible limits, a room that stretched as far as he could see.

Even in his stupor, he knew what It was. It was not what he might have expected, neither the creature of his nightmares nor the devil of the Christians. It was something less mysterious, yet something far more terrible—It was man, yet more than man . . .

Without thinking, without caring, Robert Smith walked forward. It had prepared a chair for him, and there he sat. He could see thousands of others, each in his own chair, each gray and shriveled, each half hidden in the spiderweb of wires and feeding tubes that stretched from chair to chair. All of their minds were joined, welded together by the same ingenious science that had nearly destroyed mankind with its flaming bombs. Each man was a neuron, and each wire was a synapse . . .

Robert Smith could faintly feel a thousand tiny needles pierce his forehead and drill into his skull. But before It consumed him, before It digested him for Its own inscrutable purposes, he had time to scream one word . . .

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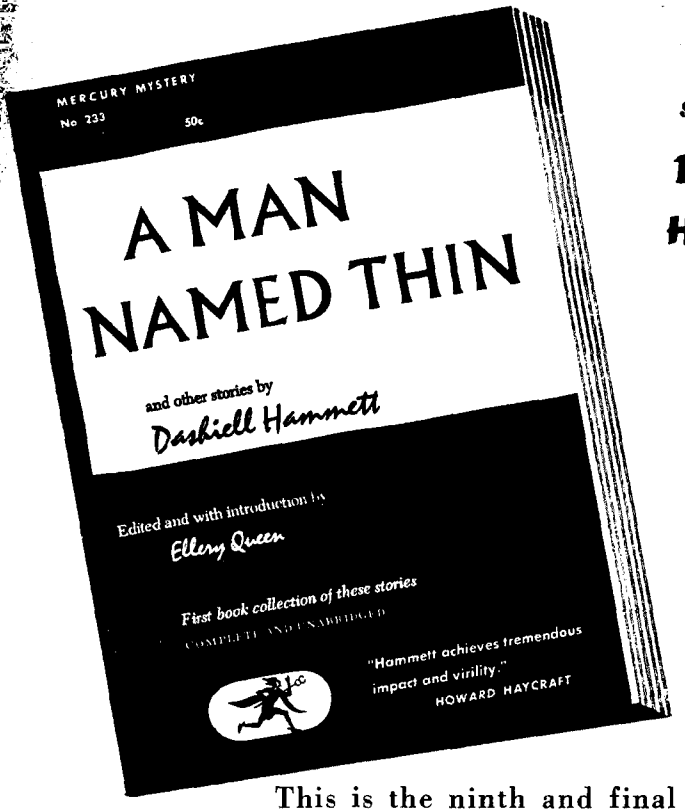

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